



WHEN STORIES TRAVEL

Cross-Cultural Encounters between Fiction and Film

by CRISTINA DELLA COLETTA

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When Stories Travel

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*Cross-Cultural Encounters
between Fiction and Film*

Cristina Della Coletta

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To Alexander and Stephanie

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Note to the Reader

Throughout the text I have provided translations for passages quoted in languages other than English. I used published translations when available and cited the sources accordingly. In all other instances the translations are mine.

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When Stories Travel

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Introduction

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.

RUDYARD KIPLING, *THE BALLAD OF EAST AND WEST*

The picture means itself. The sentence means itself. The two can never meet.

J. HILLIS MILLER, *ILLUSTRATION*

All tradition . . . depends on the unlocking and mediating spirit that we, like the Greeks, name after Hermes: the messenger of the gods.

HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *TRUTH AND METHOD*

"Nobody loves an adaptation," Joy Gould Boyum wrote with terse finality almost thirty years ago. Boyum was referring neither to the general public's response to adaptations nor to the recognition that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) professionals have consistently bestowed upon films based on literary works but, rather, to a widespread scholarly prejudice against the adaptive practice.¹ Boyum argued that the study of adaptation had been exiled to a "no-man's land," hopelessly caught between conflicting aesthetic claims and rivalries.² Regarded as either insufficiently literary because it deals with pictures, or inadequately cinematic since it stems from words, *adaptation* accomplished the self-defeating feat of threatening both film and fiction while it simultaneously dissatisfied both. "Defenders on both sides," Boyum concluded "fail to see how many of their positions follow from doctrinaire notions about the nature and role of art, [and] from simple bias toward one medium, or the other" (15). Since 1985, the no-man's land that Boyum described has undergone numerous reterritorializations, as the study of adaptation has profited from various theoretical contributions, such as structuralist and poststructuralist analysis, deconstruction and Lacanian psy-

choanalysis, narratology and semiology, reception and performativity theories, and cultural and postcolonial studies and media theory.³

No longer doomed to the contested zone separating two battling sovereign powers or to the dumping ground for cast-off intellectual matter,⁴ adaptation dwells in what I term an *agoraic* domain. This is the multicultural and multilingual marketplace where a stereophony of “citations, references, echoes, [and] cultural languages” engages the notion of *interpretive plurality* in the ongoing production and negotiation of meaning (Barthes, *Image* 160). With Peter Stallybrass and Allon White I view the cultural notion of the marketplace as defining simultaneously a “bounded enclosure” and a place of free commerce:

It is both the imagined centre of an urban community and its structural interconnection with the network of goods, commodities, markets, sites of commerce and places of production which sustain it. A marketplace is the epitome of local identity . . . and the unsettling of that identity by the trade and traffic of goods from elsewhere. At the market centre of the polis we discover a commingling of categories usually kept separate and opposed: centre and periphery, inside and outside, stranger and local, commerce and festivity, high and low. In the marketplace pure and simple categories of thought find themselves perplexed and one-sided. Only hybrid notions are appropriate to such a hybrid place. (27)

The agoraic domain of adaptation, by extension, is a “commonplace” in the sense of an “intersection, a crossing of ways,” a conjuncture of production and consumption that can be defined only by the plurality of its voices, the expandability of its borders, and the complex interplay of cultural forces and ideological constructs that operate within its changing boundaries.⁵ This increasingly capacious domain of migration and contamination, convergence and differentiation, creation and consumption inspires both homage and contestation, affection and antagonism. In the “postcelluloid world” of new media technologies, adaptation both exploits and comes to terms with ever more sophisticated strategies of interaction, exchange, and transformation. In a propitious development adaptation has become a heterocosm open to all types of genres and media. “Writ large,” write Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, “adaptation includes almost any act of alteration performed upon specific cultural works of the past and dovetails with a general process of *cultural recreation*” that responds to changing environments and evolving tastes (4, emphasis added).

Adaptation as Hermeneutical Encounter

When Stories Travel includes the contribution of hermeneutical theories to this theoretical polyphony and regards adaptations as encounters: encounters across media—fiction and film primarily—and across cultures and traditions. By engaging adaptation in both formal and cultural terms as a process of transmediation and cross-cultural dialogue, I emphasize the transformative hermeneutical power of the adaptive encounter. Undoubtedly, some of the encounters studied in this book could be ascribed to predictable affinities. A shared *Weltanschauung*, determined by and yet extending beyond specific spaces and times, may justify, for example, Bernardo Bertolucci's engagement with the Jorge Luis Borges of "Tema del traidor y del héroe" in *La strategia del ragno*, or Federico Fellini's adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" in the short film *Toby Dammit*. Other encounters may strike one as much more unlikely. The dialogue between Luchino Visconti, a learned intellectual steeped in European high art, and James M. Cain, the author of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, is a case in point, at least with viewers unfamiliar with the practices of the *nouvelle vague*, and yet it generated a masterpiece such as *Ossessione*. Mere serendipity may account for other encounters still, such as those that inspired the multilingual and nomadic conversations of Antonio Tabucchi's *Notturmo indiano* and Alain Corneau's *Nocturne indien*.⁶

Regardless of individual circumstances and particularities, all dialogic encounters—especially those that involve temporal and spatial distance and that implicate semiotic difference—simultaneously inspire and challenge understanding, which I intend as *interpretation*, a hermeneutical enterprise. In *Philosophical Hermeneutics* Hans-Georg Gadamer spoke of the hermeneutical event as an "encounter" made of questions and answers between two or more interlocutors: "When one enters into dialogue with another person and then is carried along further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person . . . that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statements and counterstatements and in the end plays them into each other" (66). Understanding, therefore, does not mean duplicating the "real" or sanctioned meaning of a subject matter (its *telos*) as its original author had intended it. In the realm of adaptation studies this notion would be akin to what Robert Stam aptly defines as "the chimera" of fidelity, the aspiration, that is, of faithfully transposing a novel into a film and evaluating the film in terms of its closeness to the original. Subject to a

hermeneutics of authority, the fidelity argument rests on the assumption that the “precursor” text is a source of absolute meaning that must be imparted upon a derivative or subaltern form.⁷ Adaptation involves a process of “trans-coding” and reculturalization of diverse intertexts that defies the primacy of an authoritative literary source over its reverential cinematic replica (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 7, 16).⁸

By now obsolete, the *vexata quaestio* of fidelity has been attacked from numerous venues and will not concern us in this book.⁹ Nor will I devote substantial time to discussing the counterview that defends the uniqueness and untranslatability of the literary and cinematic forms. Unapologetically essentialist, this view can be summarized in Giorgio Bassani’s statement that “a demarcating wall raises itself between cinema and literature, to represent [the boundary between] two fundamentally different media.”¹⁰ Bassani echoed a fairly common opinion: one can only think of George Bluestone’s facetious assertion that the analogies between fiction and film are comparable to those between ballet and architecture (5).¹¹ The essentialist argument contends that an artwork’s pure essence and organic totality, as the product “of a single controlling sensibility” (Boyum 15), cannot be transferred to other formal expressions without causing its *contaminatio* or betrayal. The moralistic overtones of this argument are evident in Giacomo Debenedetti’s defense of an aesthetic “truth” that is “indivisible from the form in which it has been embodied.”¹² The truth-content of a work, in other words, can find its ideal and permanent manifestation in only one necessary and autonomous form: its very own.¹³ In more current critical terminology this approach argues against the separability of story and discourse and can be summarized in Jean Mitry’s dictum that “the means of expression *in being different* would express different things—not the same things in different ways” (“Remarks” 1).¹⁴ More interesting contributions among the defenders of medium-specificity came from scholars (Beja, Carroll, McDougal) who chose to investigate the comparative strengths of each medium and focused on what “a medium does best compared to other media” (Carroll 8). By concentrating on the technological specificity of film, these studies reached the valuable goal of debunking cinema’s subjection to or dependence on literature and furnished a more sophisticated understanding of the “physical and technical aspects” of the medium (Beja 20).

These two mutually exclusive approaches share the assumption that a literary work contains an “originary core” and a “kernel of meaning” (Stam, “Beyond Fidelity” 57) that can be either reproduced effectively in an adaptation

(in the case of the fidelity approach) or cannot be transferred at all because of the “automatic difference” between the two discursive systems, one founded on words and the other on images (the essentialist or “categorical” argument, to borrow Kamilla Elliott’s definition). Rather than positing the existence of an original idea or, more vaguely, of an essential “something,” that the good adapter, like a skilled detective, seeks and reveals, I share the view that a literary work has no exclusive mode of existence and no unique and more or less extractable essence, which its ideal reader (the author’s brotherly double) is eminently suited to understand. Any text “comes into being only as a partner in a cooperative venture” with numberless interpreters who bring to bear “an entire constellation of past experiences, personal associations, cultural biases and aesthetic preconceptions” (Boyum xi). Here the practice of adaptation becomes a complex operation, where the linear transaction between an original (mostly single) authored text and its (ideal or implicit) reader leaves space for a multivoiced and kaleidoscopic exchange that includes numerous producers, testers, and transformers of meaning. Rather than searching for an elusive essence, the hermeneutics of adaptation views the literary text as a space of heteroglossia, which can “generate a plethora of possible readings” and can be “reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation” (Stam, “Beyond Fidelity” 57).¹⁵ And, rather than evoking the hierarchical and teleological linearity linking source and end product in a perfect straight line, the adaptive theoretical model I apply to the case studies included here visualizes a spatial articulation that points in multiple directions and engages different voices in synergetic and transformative tension.

In a context mindful of cultural and temporal variation, the analogy between translation and adaptation is still a useful tool if the goal of translation is intended not as the achievement of an absolute “likeness to the original” but, rather, as “a transformation and renewal” by which the “original undergoes a change” (Benjamin, “The Task” 73).¹⁶ Both adaptations and translations can alter the so-called original by means of what I would call “principled mistranslations”—demystifying readings that do not shy away from confronting the perceived ethos of the adapted text. In discussing translation, Gadamer argues that the translator must recognize “the value of the alien, even antagonistic character of the text and its expression” and negotiate its meaning in light of contemporary worldviews, mores, and beliefs (*Truth* 387). This approach complicates the rhetoric of the primary master source—a Pla-

tonic original—and its derivative or secondary copy (what Barthes defined as “the myth of filiation” ruled by the principle of sameness).¹⁷ On the contrary, an adaptation may “subvert its original, perform a double paradoxical job of masking and unveiling its source” (Cohen, “Eisenstein’s Subversive Adaptation” 255). A “hybridizing instance” of adaptation, like translation, is marked by disparity and plurality: it is an encounter between languages, histories, and cultures viewed as heterogeneous and changeable *events* rather than as stable and normative entities (Sakai 3).

The notion of adaptation as translation is also useful because, in emphasizing processes of transformation and change, it recognizes that interpretation is possible only when interpreters share a basic comprehension of a subject matter (what Gadamer calls *die Sache*): the basic level of understanding shared by fiction and film stands on the common ground of narrative. A fundamental form of human comprehension according to cultural anthropologists and narratologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, narrative is “present in every age, in every place, in every society. . . . All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by [people] with different, even opposing cultural backgrounds. . . . Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural” (Barthes, *Image* 79). As “pan-global facts of culture” (White, *The Content* 1), narratives respond to the enduring need to “humanize time” and make sense of “our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience” by structuring it into a comprehensible form (Kermode 160; Ricoeur xi).¹⁸ In this sense both fiction and film are “arts of narrative action,” storytelling arts defined by their intrinsic narrativity—that is, their dynamic, teleological impulse and their ability to shape a mere succession of events into a coherent and meaningful whole.¹⁹ Storytelling arts share an essential narrative potential that is variously actualized in a discursive performance through the technical formulas, semiotic configurations, and communicative devices of specific media (what Gaudreault and Marion define as “*médiativité*” [48–49]). Not tied to a unique medium, narrative is transferable, migratory, and ready to seek hospitality in and adapt itself to multiple signifying domains (Hamon 264).

Arguing that “in the cinema, one extracts the thought from the image; in literature the image from the thought”—as Geoffrey Wagner does (in a citation attributed to André Levinson)—does not mean positing the existence of a root difference between the two semiotic systems (11–12).²⁰ On the contrary, it means recognizing that both literature and film engage conceptual and per-

ceptual strategies that, in their different combinations and interactions, help us give narrative form (“decode” as well as “recode”) to the world in which we live. In *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of an Exchange* Keith Cohen argued that what allows the analysis of the relation between two separate sign systems such as fiction and film is the fact that some of the same structures (Barthes’s “codes”) may reappear in both systems. Narrative, Cohen concluded, “is the most solid median link between novel and cinema” (92). As narratives, novels and films produce a diegesis; that is, they tell a story. Underscoring this fundamental commonality does not mean overlooking the fact that film says things that could be conveyed also in the language of literature, “yet it says them differently.” This difference is indeed the “reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptation” (Metz, *Film Language* 12). After all, as Robert Scholes put it with self-conscious impatience, “a writer who wants to be a camera should probably make a movie” (“Narration” 292). The difference between film and fiction can be condensed in the argument that, whereas some codes can be *transferred* from one medium to the other, other codes require an *adaptation proper*, as they are unique to precise media (Marcus 21; McFarlane, *Novel to Film* 11–12).

As McFarlane and Bordwell argue, borrowing well-tested narratological tools, *narrative* (or story, *histoire*, *fabula*) refers to a series of events and happenings “sequentially and *consequently* arranged” that are transferable because not tied to any specific semiotic system.²¹ This is the level that Barthes assigned to what he labeled the “distributional” functions of narrative: “the essence of a function is, so to speak, the seed that it sows in the narrative, planting an element that will come to fruition later” (*Image* 89). Referring to “consecutive” and “consequential” actions and events, distributional functions belong to syntagmatic ratifications and metonymic relata—they respond to the needs of temporality and causality identified in Scholes’s classic analysis of narrative (“Narration” 287). *Narration* (in the literary medium) and *enunciation* (in the cinema), instead, define the manner of delivery that shapes the narrative into a medium-specific form.²² Referring to *how* something happens, this level (varyingly defined as that of discourse, *discours*, *sjužet*) includes elements such as voice, manipulations of linear time, and use of point of view that require strategies of adaptation when moving from one semiotic system to another.²³

Because it can be transferred directly, the level of narrative proper poses no technical problem in the adaptation process, and scholars have concentrated on the challenges of adaptation as formal metamorphosis from the realm of

narration (literary discourse) to that of enunciation (cinematic discourse). In this area a model of analogy (equivalence) has traditionally explained the adaptation practice: “films locate analogous, already complete signs in their own lexicons that approximate literary signs” (Elliott 4).²⁴ As Elliott contends, it would be reductive to limit adaptation to this analogical (or comparative) model, because it adheres to the word-image dichotomy and puts images at the service of words. By locating visual equivalents for the novelist’s verbal descriptors, this model of analogy often uses iconic signs as the subservient correlatives of linguistic signs, to the point of drafting close equivalences between verbal language and film “language.” The frame, for example, is seen as the parallel of the word, the shot of the sentence, the scene of the paragraph, the sequence of the chapter, while the rules of grammar and syntax are regarded as analogous to those of editing (Beja 34; Murray 110; Richardson 65–66). In their most valuable achievements, however, analogical approaches have provided theoretically sophisticated tools to identify and evaluate the sheer range of signifying conventions specific to, as well as shared by, the two different media (McFarlane’s and Elliott’s volumes are cases in point).²⁵

While endowing the field of adaptation studies with the methodological rigor lacking in early impressionistic analyses of the encounters between fiction and film, the approaches I have described so far share a tendency to veer toward rigid taxonomic categorizations.²⁶ They also emphasize formalistic readings, somewhat detached from sociohistorical concerns and cultural involvements and specificities. Even the subtle methodology of André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, which they label narrative mediatics, reduces adaptation to a univocal, if sophisticated, formal exercise (61).²⁷ Similarly, when exploiting Émile Benveniste’s notion of *énonciation* as the “discursive instance,” defining the way in which the enunciated material (*énoncé*) is mediated, Metz agrees that enunciation is an act of production and appropriation of meaning that implies an *énonciateur* (speaker) and an *énonciataire* (receiver). He contends, however, that *énonciateur* and *énonciataire* must be conceived as the textual entities of classical structuralism, not to be confused with empirical human subjects (*L’énonciation* 11–12). In a radical separation between text and context Metz insists that the enunciation does not relate to anything outside of the filmic space. A world unto itself, the filmic domain both creates and contains its *impersonal* source and destination.

Strict fidelity to Benveniste’s theories, and to the notion of a vacuum-sealed cinematic space, would be problematic in the porous and multivoiced world of

adaptation. After all, novels and films share a quintessentially *adaptive* quality, in that they incorporate, reformulate, reaccentuate, and parody innumerable other codes and, in doing so, continue to evolve, reassessing and transforming themselves in a thoughtful interplay with contemporary reality.²⁸ Mindful of Bakhtin's lesson, Stam points out:

Both novel and film have consistently cannibalized antecedent genres and media. The novel began by orchestrating a polyphonic diversity of materials—court fictions, travel literature, religious allegory, jestbooks,—into a new narrative form, repeatedly plundering or annexing neighboring arts, creating new hybrids like poetic novels, dramatic novels, epistolary novels, and so forth. The cinema subsequently brought this cannibalization to its paroxysm. As a rich, sensorially composite language, the cinema as a medium is open to all kinds of literary and pictorial energies and symbolism, to all collective representations, to all ideological currents, to all aesthetic trends, and to the infinite play of influences within cinema, within the other arts, and within culture generally. (*Literature through Film* 6–7)²⁹

If we interpret Benveniste's *énonciation* as a historically situated "utterance" (in tune with Bakhtinian translanguistics), then, adaptations become not only powerfully synergetic formal structures but also concrete vehicles for cross-cultural dialogue.³⁰ If, in other words, one restores anthropological three-dimensionality to Benveniste's and Barthes's *êtres de papier*, and posits that the act of enunciation is a process of production, mediation, and appropriation of meaning that is founded in human action and includes human-made texts and their contexts, discussions of adaptation can become more fruitful and concrete.³¹ As Linda Hutcheon and Francesco Casetti point out, the adapter's decoding and recoding of novelistic materials occurs in culturally specific contexts: "Stories . . . do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genre). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and communicate narrative meaning *to someone in some context* and they are created *by someone* with that intent" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 26).³² Adaptation implies a conscious act of recontextualization, a journey from one communicative environment to another: "There is a kind of dialogue between the society in which the works, both the adapted text and adaptation, are produced and that in which they are received, and both are in dialogue with the works themselves" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 149).³³

In this agoraic domain it is well worth retrieving Scholes's definition of *narrativity*, which he sees as the interpreter's involvement in constructing a story, an operation that implies assigning cultural and emotional values to the narrative, values that may be shared among, or contested by, diverse interpreters. "The images presented to us," Scholes writes, "their arrangement and juxtapositioning, are narrational blueprints for a fiction that must be constructed by the viewer's narrativity" ("Narration" 293). Scholes fends off the criticism that he is moving away from the safety of ordered formal structures and into the "airy realm" of subjective speculations and impressionistic responses by analyzing how narrativity is an act of "conceptualization" that goes well beyond a situation of mere "stimulus and response" ("Narration" 295). Conceptualization endows the configurational structures that make up the narrative with culturally specific connotations and values ("Narration" 292).

If we expand Scholes's analysis to the area of adaptation, conceptualization entails a process of understanding and reworking of a range of codes: the general codes of narrative, medium-specific codes, and codes shared by different media. The construction of meaning that takes place in this process considers the ways in which these codes interact as indexes of "the ideologies, values, and conventions" by which producers and interpreters "order experience and predicate activity" (Klein 4). The encounter between producers and interpreters necessitates that these codes be refunctioned in historically bound circumstances, according to specific cultural presuppositions, ideological needs, and formal requirements.³⁴ I start with what A. J. Greimas defines as the "deep structures of narrative"—the structures that condense shared aspects of human experience and understanding.³⁵ My readings examine how these structures become embedded in culturally specific frameworks and reappear, while being refunctioned, in selected literary works and their cinematic adaptations. Mythical patterns (via the lessons of Lévi-Strauss and Northrop Frye), archetypal expressive modes (such as the grotesque—an eminently transmedial mode—as studied by Wolfgang Kayser), transhistorical narrative codes (such as the epic, in Bakhtin's interpretation), and psychological structures (Freud's "uncanny") interact with specific semiotic and cultural systems in the hermeneutical encounters that define the adaptive journeys across media and cultures on which we are about to embark.³⁶

The Role of Prejudice and the Horizon of Adaptation

The theoretical framework described so far regards cinematic adaptation as not merely dependent on the alleged meaning of an original text but, rather, as intent in actualizing that very text by endowing it with new significance in a “*thoughtful mediation with contemporary life*” (Gadamer, *Truth* 169). Adaptation is the cinematic understanding of a literary work that comes into being through the director’s *own* recoding and, in its novel form, participates in hermeneutical conversations with its changing spectatorship.³⁷ Even in the case of *auteurist* films, the director’s refunctioning of meaning is not individually owned, as the very notion of authorship in film must be considered in a collaborative and polyphonic sense that includes, among many others, screenwriters, cinematographers, editors, actors, music composers, and costume designers—all the crew members, in sum, that, in varying roles and degrees of involvement, participate in the interpretive and creative production under the director’s leadership or, rather, “orchestration.”³⁸ Viewing the cinematic medium in this sense, we can agree with André Bazin, who, as early as 1946, prophetically if perhaps too optimistically, stated that “all things considered, it is possible to imagine that we are moving toward a reign of adaptation in which the notion of the unity of the work of art, if not the very notion of the author himself, will be destroyed” (27).

Interpretation is always a collective endeavor: an exchange (intended in both formal and cultural terms) that ushers the possibility to understand *differently*, to open oneself up to the prospect of having to rectify one’s own anticipations and prejudices. In tune with Gadamerian hermeneutics, “prejudices” should not be intended negatively as false, unreasoned, and biased claims but rather as unavoidable conditions of understanding, in fact as part of the *intentionality* of the hermeneutical process.³⁹ Any novel, Stam argues, “can generate any number of adaptational readings which are inevitably partial, personal, conjectural, interested” (“Introduction” 25). As we cannot abstract ourselves from our historical context, our interpretations inevitably come marked by prejudices, in the sense of pre-opinions or prejudgments, deriving from the cultural and ideological presuppositions and sociohistorical determinants that we bring with us and “situate” (position) us in the world:

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous. . . . In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, consti-

tute the initial directness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are closed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, “Nothing new will be said here.” Instead we welcome just the guest who promises something new to our curiosity. (Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 9)

If there is no understanding without preconceptions, the real task is to test these prejudices critically and self-consciously. In *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* Boyum discussed the “very different preconceptions” (44) and varied responses that five viewers of differing ages, genders, past experiences, personal associations, literary proficiency, and aesthetic presuppositions brought to a screening of Alan Pakula’s *Sophie’s Choice*, the film based on William Styron’s 1979 homonymous novel. Boyum’s thoughtful reading of the range of responses to Pakula’s adaptation confirms Gadamer’s claim that attentive interpreters can sift “blind” prejudices (such as misjudgments and flawed evaluations) from enabling or justified (“berechtigte”) prejudices precisely through the dialogic encounters “with what is at once alien to us, makes a claim upon us, and has an affinity with what we are that we can open ourselves to risking and testing our prejudices” (R. Bernstein 128–29).⁴⁰

While some prejudices help create more nuanced and tolerant interpretations, others depend on shared cultural biases and intellectual presuppositions that, once identified, demand reassessment and correction. Recent studies on adaptation have drawn attention to “deeply entrenched, pre-theoretical notions of what an adaptation is, . . . conceptions which are widely held but mostly unstated and unexplored” (Cardwell 9). Stam identified a series of such prejudices that have marked adaptation discourse in general, such as the cult of seniority (older arts regarded as better arts), the belief in the superiority of written over visual forms (what he terms *iconophobia* and *logophilia*, respectively), and the class bias that sees cinema as a mere form of mass entertainment and, as a consequence, views adaptations as “dumbed-down” versions of their source novels (“Introduction” 5–7).⁴¹ Besides the persistence of the fidelity bias based on the status of the literary “original,” Michael Klein, Brian McFarlane, and Imelda Whelehan examined the intersection of complex codes at work in cinema and thus corrected the misconceptions that films cannot render complex psychological states and fluid temporal structures and

are bound to record only the surface of action (simplifying characters and making few demands on the imagination). They questioned the prejudice that film cannot adapt certain types of novels by paying attention to the specificity as well as (or rather than) the replicability of the multiple semiotic systems involved in the adaptive encounter (Klein 5–9; McFarlane, “Reading” 15–17; Whelehan, “Adaptations” 6).⁴²

As evidenced in Boyum’s account of the diverse responses to *Sophie’s Choice*, understanding is not simply an activity that a subject performs in order to discover something that is somewhere out there: It is a “happening,” an “event,” or, in Hutcheon’s words, a “process,” which is transformative and dynamic for all parties involved in the hermeneutical experience (Gadamer, *Truth* 125). It means to look at otherness without assimilating it to an absolute set of opinions and value judgments and our own expectations of meaning but as an opportunity to test our prejudices in a developing framework of reciprocity, all the while knowing that no understanding is ever completely free of prejudice. This awareness is particularly imperative when an interpreter experiences works that belong to cultural and historical areas different from one’s own.⁴³ An authentic hermeneutical attitude requires letting what seems to be far and alienated “by cultural or historical distances speak again” (Gadamer, “Practical Philosophy” 83).⁴⁴ This receptivity is not acquired with pseudo-objective neutrality or the illusion of having a bird’s-eye view on a reality that exists as such and over which a detached spectator soars. Gadamer insists that it is “neither possible, necessary, nor desirable that we put ourselves within brackets” (“The Problem” 152). If understanding implies the ability to transpose ourselves into different domains and, in fact, requires the art of responding to texts, traditions, and other people and their mores, it does not mean that one has to disregard oneself, as the Western traveler in *Nocturne indien* makes clear. Undoubtedly, we must make the effort to imagine ourselves in the other’s situation, but to do this, “we must bring, precisely, *ourselves*” into that very situation (Gadamer, *Truth* 305; emphasis added).⁴⁵

Becoming aware of our hermeneutical situation is not an easy task, as the very idea of a “situation” means that we are not standing outside it and able to observe it from an objective point of view. As we inevitably find ourselves *within* a situation, reflection and evaluation are never absolute and complete, yet they carry the capability to “self-consciously designate our opinions and prejudices and qualify them as such, and in so doing strip them of their extreme character” (Gadamer, “The Problem” 152). Gadamer defined

the concept of “situation” as representing a “standpoint that limits the possibility of vision,” and he connected it to the idea of “horizon” as “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (*Truth* 302). Neither notion—situation or horizon—is to be interpreted in a static framework. Human existence takes place in time and space, that is, historically, and is not bound to a fixed position—a closed horizon. Just as an individual does not exist in isolation but in connection with others, so, too, the closed horizon that supposedly frames a specific culture is an abstraction: “The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving” (Gadamer, *Truth* 304).

Understanding a different horizon does not involve crossing over into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own but, rather, achieving that fusion of horizons that allows us to see the world from a larger perspective. A *knowing* audience enters the adaptive process with a varied set of experiences, memories, competencies, biases, emotional as well as conceptual presuppositions, namely with a “horizon of expectations.”⁴⁶ By entering into play with the adapting work, all these expectations undergo transformative changes while interpreting (and thus modifying) both the adapting and the adapted work—thus the horizon evolves and challenges fixed notions of priority, originality, univocity, and stability of meaning.

Adaptive Journeys and the Hermeneutics of Estrangement

Gadamer’s philosophical system celebrates the positive potential of hermeneutics: in principle there is nothing beyond the possibility of understanding, that is, beyond the possibility of a constructive overcoming of differences. From this perspective, *agreement* is the logical outcome of the hermeneutical encounter: “The task of hermeneutics has always been to establish agreement where there was none or where it had been disturbed in some way” (Gadamer, *Truth* 292). In formal terms this experience of agreement corresponds to the creation of cognitive and aesthetic structures based on balance and proportion: “The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understand-

ing has failed" (Gadamer, *Truth* 291). As hermeneutical devices, narrative plots constitute precisely these ordering and unifying systems. Narratives are configurations of events emphasizing causality, exorcizing chance, and conforming to "the requirements of necessity or probability governing succession" (Ricoeur 39). A plot's logical inner ordering, in other words, corresponds to its ability to overcome enumeration and seriality by extracting a "configuration" from a mere "succession" of events. "To the extent that in the ordering of events the causal connection (one thing as a cause of another) prevails over pure succession (one thing after another)," writes Paul Ricoeur, "a universal emerges that is . . . the ordering itself erected as a type" (69). This kind of configuration responds to our nostalgia for order: the deeply felt human need for the known and the familiar—the recognition that "order is our homeland *despite everything*" (Ricoeur 72).

If, like Ricoeur, Gadamer regards the *outcome* of hermeneutics as harmonizing and unifying, one should not forget that he frequently couches the hermeneutical *process* in less than concordant tones: "Every encounter involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present" (*Truth* 306). Understanding, here, results from the friction and even antagonism between the two polar opposites of "strangeness and familiarity": "The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two [i.e., strangeness and familiarity] but in consciously bringing it out" (*Truth* 291, 306). Gadamer's trust in harmonious resolution (resolution that is never final but the intermediate goal in a persistently renewed process), implies awareness that the journey toward understanding includes, and in fact welcomes, the variance of thought and disparity of opinions, which, when involved in a dialogic framework, inspire rather than hinder interpretation and knowledge.

As I interpret the texts and films included in this book as a series of hermeneutical journeys across cultural borders and aesthetic media, I am indebted to Gadamer's notion that the process of understanding is set in motion by the interaction between strangeness and familiarity. When arguing that it is impossible to become aware of a prejudice until we provoke it critically, rather than letting it operate unnoticed, Gadamer is saying that this prejudice becomes discernible and questionable for us through our encounter with a subject matter that inspires us to put at risk what we have passively accepted as valid and true. This dynamics between familiarity and strangeness is remarkably close to the Russian formalists' definition of *priëm ostraneniia* (the "device

of making it strange") (Erich 177). Combining Gadamerian and Šklovskijian terminology, and with an eye to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* ("alienation effect"), one could argue that by testing our preconceptions and prejudices and neutralizing our stock responses and habitual interpretations, an artwork inspires a heightened, nonjaded perspective—a clearer understanding that restores "density" (Šklovskij's *faktura*) to the world around us (Erich 177). As engaged interpreters, we, too, estrange the artwork from its original socio-historical coordinates by highlighting certain aspects and deemphasizing others, and by posing queries that differ from those of earlier interpreters, who were moved by different concerns, questions, and prejudices. The complex dynamics that simultaneously make the familiar strange and the unfamiliar known produces understanding.⁴⁷ With understanding comes the awareness that the ideological and cultural formulae that guide interpretation and the formal structures that shape understanding are not natural but historical and "human-made," and therefore capable of evolution and change.

Estrangement is treated here as a fundamental and multifaceted component of the adaptation process. As Millicent Marcus pointed out in *Filmmaking by the Book*, one of the most fertile discussions of adaptation addresses the ways in which "film culture responds to a narrative form that it considers 'other,' either in its institutional, ideological, or signifying capacity" (2). While I focus on the sociohistorical and cultural determinants that shaped the dialogues between the literary works and films analyzed in this book, I do not intend to imply that formal concerns are outside of my purview. The "hermeneutics of estrangement" that I propose as the guiding concept in my analysis of the adaptation process regards all signifying systems (as structuring of codes that make up a text's enunciatory framework, *emplot* its *story*, and help construct its meaning) as both ideological and formal constructs. If novels and films become distinct by the ways in which their common narrative is reconfigured, that is, made "other," creatively deformed and defamiliarized into their discursive forms, the respective acts of emplotment are depositories of cultural and ideological meaning. When this meaning is shared by a community of interpreters, it slowly becomes naturalized and ends up being accepted as a universal form of reality rather than a way in which reality is preordained via specific discursive forms. This is especially true of works that employ the deep levels of narrative with a minimum of reworking or aesthetic self-consciousness. The claim to truth of historical narratives rests precisely on this cognitive presupposition, as Hayden White demonstrates in *Metahistory*. By inviting

analysis of the similarities and differences between the forms of emplotment of novels and films, adaptations help us “lay bare” (expose, “see”) what tends to remain concealed in more monolithic, less dialogical expressions, namely, the ideology of form.⁴⁸ A valuable portion of the hermeneutical significance of adaptation, then, resides in the estranging process that representational forms undergo through their mutual encounters.

One of the primary forms of estrangement occurs when patterns of repetition and parallelism alter the habitual linear flow of communication or engage the familiar causal and chronological configuration of the conventional narrative plot. To refer to Roman Jakobson’s and Louis Hjelmslev’s technical terminology, one could argue for the estranging potential of the “poetic function” (intended here *latu sensu*) in its ability to project the principle of equivalence from the metaphoric or paradigmatic axis (the plane of simultaneity or selection) to the metonymic or syntagmatic axis (the plane of contiguity or combination).⁴⁹ As Barthes reminds us, to understand a narrative plot, one does not merely follow the “unfolding of the story”—one has to recognize “its construction in ‘storeys,’” and “project the horizontal concatenation of the narrative ‘thread’ on to an implicitly vertical axis” (*Image* 87). “Meaning,” Barthes contends, “is not ‘at the end’ of the narrative, it runs across it” (*Image* 87). *When Stories Travel* examines how, in differing ways, a sample of significant literary works and films exploit the often-unresolved “tension” between their paradigmatic and syntagmatic planes as ways to produce new and deeper understanding. This understanding frequently occurs in the liminal space between the two planes—the shifting and ambivalent “frontiers [where] creation has a chance to occur” according to Barthes (*Elements* 88)—rather than in the center of allegedly homogeneous, and self-sufficient wholes.

The opening sequence of Bertolucci’s *La strategia del ragno* (*The Spider’s Stratagem*, 1970) is a good example of this hermeneutics of estrangement in the multimedia adaptive context discussed so far. Bertolucci opens his film with a stunning pictorial parade: a cinematic homage to Antonio Ligabue (1899–1965), the Swiss-Italian *naïf* artist whose painterly genius vindicated an itinerant existence steeped in isolation, abjection, and madness. All the pieces that Bertolucci selected from the richly illustrated monograph that Franco Maria Ricci devoted to the eccentric painter in 1967 repeat the same theme: they all feature animals, often captured in dramatic close-ups that emphasize similar physical details (the exposed fangs of a lion and a tiger, for example).⁵⁰ Bertolucci’s visual pageant starts, appropriately for the film’s title, with *La*

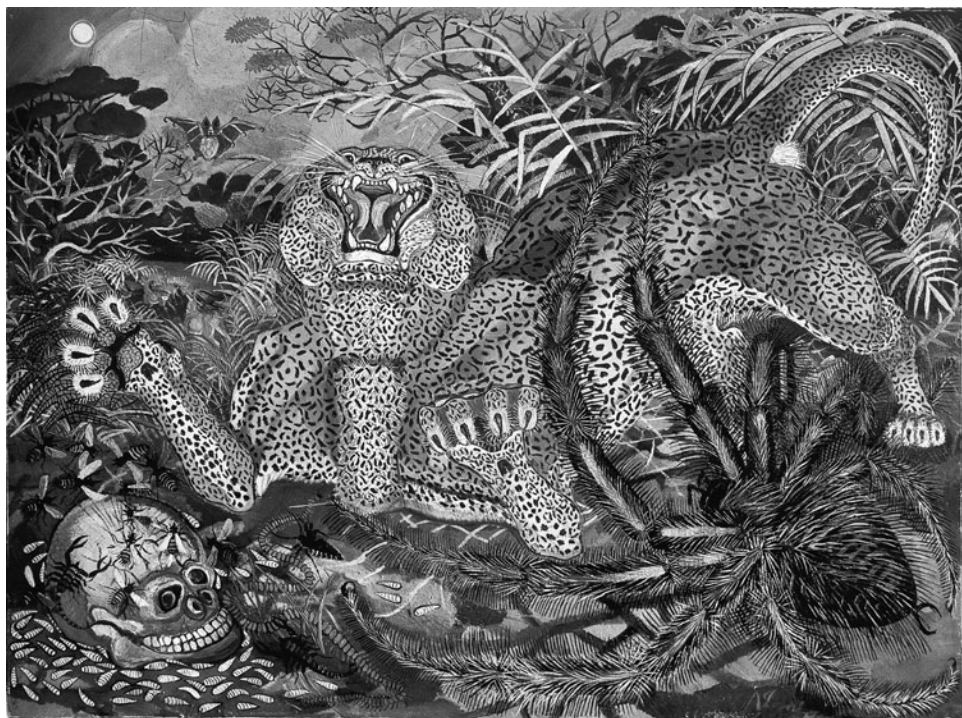


Figure I.1. *Vedova nera*. Oil on faesite, 102 cm × 134 cm. Centro Studi e Archivio Ligabue, Parma (Italy). Used by permission.

vedova nera, Ligabue's painting of a gigantic black widow spider attacking a leopard (fig. I.1). As the sequence progresses, however, it becomes clear that the pictorial chain rests on criteria of difference as well as analogy, negation as well as affirmation. These duplicative and contrastive patterns challenge the linear succession of the cinematic frames.

Bertolucci intersperses canvases in bold, warm, and sunbathed colors with pictures that capture the cold, bluish hues of impending dusk and early sunrise. Wild animals in jungle settings precede or follow serene village scenes. Paintings of a snake coiling around a lion and of the gaping jaws of a tiger contrast with picturesque images of chickens, tabby cats, dogs, and farmhands at work. Peaceful rural landscapes, oxen and calves at pasture in the foreground, alternate with grimacing gorillas; a wild boar fighting a dog; a lion, caught in midair, leaping on zebras. Villagers, with their carts and horses, incongruously herald exotic warriors mounted on fantastic battle steeds. Via Ligabue, Berto-

lucci creates the sense of an alternation—a seesaw motion—between opposite and analogous terms that complicates and resists the film's forward movement. Moreover, the individual elements of these oppositions defy either-or logic and strict causality by containing their own negations. The familiar includes a wild core, the wild a long-forgotten familiarity. For example, two roosters confronting one another in the coop or a hunting dog pointed to follow a scent in an empty nocturnal landscape foreshadow a potentially violent outcome. Conversely, wild settings alleviate their feel of impending danger through the colorful and childlike brush strokes with which they are painted, their fairy-tale quality evoking the suspended time of unreality and dreams.⁵¹

Bertolucci's pageant is not a value-free homage to Ligabue's eccentric genius but a self-conscious hermeneutical lesson, one where familiarity and strangeness are not organically fused but evoked in a domain of unresolved and provocative ambivalence, which reflects the uncanny ideological kernel of the entire film. The metaphoric arrangement of canvases within the (conventionally) metonymical structure of film invites us to carry out an interpretive effort that simultaneously engages *La strategia del ragno's* paradigmatic and syntagmatic planes. By foregrounding its metaphoric potential through Ligabue's recontextualized paintings shown in kinesthetic progression, *La strategia del ragno* estranges the filmic medium's linear succession of frames and opens it up to different questions and novel interpretations. Form delivers content, not only in the organic, linear, and causal chain of conventional emplotments but also in an analogical one, according to the structuring principles that Gilles Deleuze identified in the interconnected notions of Platonic and Nietzschean repetitions. Kamilla Elliott used a remarkably similar concept in her discussion of the adaptive practice as a whole, which she defined as the "looking glass analogy":

The . . . inverting mutual containment of facing mirrors epitomizes the blend of opposition and inherence propounded by looking glass interart analogies. . . .

. . . Reciprocal looking glass analogies do not eradicate categorical differentiation. Rather, they make the otherness of categorical differentiation (word/image, visual/verbal, eye/ear, etc.) an integral part of aesthetic and semiotic identity. . . . Two arts contain and invert the otherness of each other reciprocally, inversely, and inherently, rather than being divided from the other by their otherness. *Thus difference is as much a part of identity as resemblance.* (210, 212; emphasis added)

In *The Logic of Sense* Gilles Deleuze juxtaposes two types of repetition as he invites us to consider these two formulations: “only that which resembles differs,” and “only differences can resemble each other” (261). The first formula defines difference based on a “previous similitude or identity,” and the other conceives of “similitude and even identity as the product of a deep disparity” (Deleuze, *The Logic* 261). Deleuze concludes that the first form of repetition, which he defines as “Platonic” repetition, refers to a world of solid archetypal models, which remain unique, regardless of how many times they are reproduced. As J. Hillis Miller has pointed out, the world of Platonic archetypes “gives rise to the notion of a metaphoric expression based on genuine participative similarity or even on identity, as when Gerard Manley Hopkins says he becomes Christ, an ‘after Christ,’ through the operation of grace” (*Fiction* 6). The Platonic archetype defines the value of its copies: the closer the copy is to the model, the worthier it is, a concept that, as we have seen, founds the notion of fidelity analysis in adaptation studies.⁵² The second repetition, which Deleuze calls “Nietzschean,” is based on difference. There is no founding archetype here, and similarities “can be thought only as the product of [an] internal difference” (Deleuze, *The Logic* 262). While the first form of repetition establishes “the world as icon,” the second characterizes the world as “simulacrum” or “phantasm” (262). Unlike Platonic copies, simulacra create ungrounded doublings, that is, interrelations that are not founded upon an original paradigm or archetypal model but arise out of the “interplay of . . . opaquely similar things, opaque in the sense of riddling” (J. H. Miller, *Fiction* 8).

Though Elliott does not mention Deleuze, she suggests a meaningful difference with the Deleuzean model when she argues that in the looking-glass analogy “negation doubles as identity” and thus becomes “a substantial affirmation rather than a vaporous absence” (212). Embracing an aesthetic of excess rather than reduction, Elliott suggests that any absence is always “already inverse inherent presence” (213). Looking-glass analogies, then, turn negation and absence into a “surplus presence: poetry and painting, words and images, aural and graphic elements of words, and pictorial and symbolic elements of pictures are both/and figures rather than the either/or of categorical differentiation or the neither/nor of deconstructive *différance*” (215). In my interpretations I will combine Deleuze’s philosophical model with Elliott’s looking-glass analogy. Besides being visually compelling, Elliott’s looking-glass analogy recalls the richly evocative use of mirrors in film, the aesthetic and psychoana-

lytical implications of which have been extensively studied by Edward Branigan and Metz, among others.⁵³ Unlike Elliott's, Deleuze's model highlights the defamiliarizing and destabilizing energy produced by the interaction of Platonic and Nietzschean repetitions and asserts that if *any absence is always already inverse inherent presence*, then, and at the same time, *any presence is also already inverse inherent absence*. As this chiasmic construction demonstrates, understanding occurs in a context of reciprocal transformation, an *in-between* that opens an (epistemological, existential, aesthetic) horizon where understanding becomes possible only by being willing to reassess its logocentric presuppositions of identity, affirmation, and wholeness. As Bakhtin pointed out, any discourse "*lives as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another alien context*" (*The Dialogic* 282). Adaptation from a literary text to a film takes place in a domain of *neither excess nor reduction* but in one of mutual *displacement*, of sustained estrangement, which has a "generative" power on both aesthetic and hermeneutical grounds.⁵⁴

As a result, the literary texts and cinematic expressions that constitute this book do not shy away from situations of ontological crisis and psychological fragmentation that alter Gadamer's dialectics of the fusion of horizons. They investigate the ruptures, discontinuities, and aporias that challenge unified epistemologies and highlight the internal tensions of heterogeneous hermeneutical and aesthetic systems. These systems dispute all foundational and grounding certainties and display the uncanny ambivalences at the heart of pacifying, yet deceitful, syntheses. They undermine Gadamer's trust in the power of tradition and authority with all the disruptive and iconoclastic impertinence of ironic and parodic recodings. But, with Gadamer, they never lose sight of art's utopian potential. By celebrating "the discipline of questioning and inquiring" (*Truth* 491), the text and films with which I am concerned here participate in an ever-renewed and estranging dialogue *across* temporal distances, signifying systems, and cultural domains. While they emphasize Gadamer's awareness of the historicity of *Dasein* by analyzing the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic factors that influence the logic of the adaptation process, they demonstrate how adaptation realizes "*the true locus of hermeneutics [as an] in-between*" (*Truth* 295), the domain of dynamic mediation and cross-fertilization that engenders a wider sociohistorical and cultural competence. In this broader and hybrid (rather than organic) interpretive horizon,⁵⁵ difference is embedded in identity, identity is mirrored and displaced in difference, and the self inhabits the heterogeneous, changeable, and reflex-

ive domain where familiarity and strangeness, repetition and variation, and affirmation and negation coexist in ambivalent yet productive ways. This is indeed the agoraic space of adaptation, no longer an empty “gap” between the disciplines of literary and film studies but a hermeneutical space with hybrid and expanding boundaries, where “the richest opportunities for challenging ideas are likely to emerge” (Cartmell and Whelehan, “Introduction” 5; Corrigan 42).

While the analysis of the literary and cinematic works discussed in this book starts from the hermeneutical engagement with their deep structures, the notion of travel constitutes a more explicit *trait-d’union* among the various works. On the most superficial level travel is the experience that characters share. Whether as style of life or illusion of escape, long-distance quest or (apparently inconsequential) *crossing*, jaded business trip or journey home, through the pages of books or in real life, travel defines characters, identities, and relationships as dynamic, developing, and changeable. As literal travels display metaphorical depths and evolve into momentous existential and hermeneutical quests (or parodic and grotesque subversions thereof), their trajectories open intertextual paths and become bearers of a range of interconnected symbolic meanings. It is on this level that travel becomes also a structuring device, the objective correlative of narrativity itself as the dynamic principle that governs “the (imaginary) ensemble of all narratives, . . . the impetus that powers . . . narrative itself” (Kramer, “Musical Narratology” 144). Travel as narrative content and formal expression inspires estranging conversations within and across sign systems, sociocultural domains, and ideological constructs, thus taking part in the reconfiguration of our preconceptions of authority, identity, value, and the very modalities of our understanding.

When Stories Travel focuses on how patterns of recurrence, duplication, and mirroring defamiliarize the progressive and end-oriented modality of travel (geographic as well as narrative) on intradiegetic, intertextual, and trans-medial levels. These two modes of emplotment are not set against each other, as the positive and negative poles of universal structures. Undoubtedly, both carry enduring ideological implications. Linear travel, with its end-oriented impulse and emphasis on transformation and becoming, has often been tied to evolutionary progress (or revolutionary change in Marxian, rather than liberal, ideologies). Recursive patterns have been associated with closure, continuity, stability, and the conservative agendas supporting the return of the “perpetually identical originating from the perpetually different.”⁵⁶ But the te-

leological principle also directed the master narratives that mirrored the dominant ideology of the imperial era, and circular patterns emerged as effective ways of resisting these cultural and narrative regimes with their principles of ordering, confirming, modeling, and enforcing dominant social and political mandates. Neo-Marxist critics argued that these generative practices contested “traditional fictional concerns as thematic causality, linear chronology justified narrative viewpoint, and the like, thus working on the aesthetic level for the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois values” (Morrisette 10).

This book does not frame syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures within polarized value systems. Rather, it reveals how these structures coexist with, while simultaneously estranging, one another. It examines how “universal” codes and “deep” narrative structures can be refunctioned when traveling across cultures and media. The “human capacity to tell stories is one way men and women collectively build a significant and orderly world around themselves” (J. H. Miller, “Narrative” 69). The same human capacity to engage these very stories in a dialogical framework—to repeat but also to reinvent and transform them and the worlds they helped create—is one of the most powerful ways we have to examine the reassuring epistemological structures, shared prejudices (in the Gadamerian sense), and “convenient” cultural certainties.⁵⁷ *When Stories Travel* discusses how, in the journey from fiction to film, narratives are both repeated and estranged according to patterns of “principled disruptions” (Elliott’s looking-glass effect and Deleuze’s Nietzschean repetition). In countering ideological suasion with critical intelligence, these principled disruptions help us to chart the hybrid and hospitable domain of the hermeneutical *in-between*—a liminal and temporary space of crossing and becoming, certainly, but one that allows access to the broader horizon of an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

If, in this expansive heteroglossia, the literary and cinematic works examined here contest univocal categorizations, so does my interpretive approach to these “integrally plural” works (Barthes, *S/Z* 6). Forty years ago, in his pioneering study of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, Barthes claimed that one can either equalize all works and force them to rejoin inductively the Representative Model “from which we will then make them derive,” or one can make them “cohere . . . by the infinite paradigm of difference” (*S/Z* 3). The estranging interplay of cohesion (in the etymological sense of “sticking together”) and difference (as in differ, moving apart) is the motor of narrative and of the hermeneutical journeys across adaptations studied in this book. The unity of shared narrative

celebrates the “triumphant plural” of its discursive manifestations, where networks “are many and interact without any one of them being able to surpass the rest” (S/Z 5), and where “the paternal eye of the representative model” (the Platonic Original) is replaced by the estranging epistemology of the Nietzschean double. Describing his own approach to *Sarrasine*, Barthes wrote, “We may hope . . . to substitute for the simple representative model another model: . . . the *step-by-step* method. . . . Its very slowness and dispersion . . . is never anything but the *decomposition* (in the cinematographic sense) of the work of reading: a *slow motion*, so to speak, . . . a systematic use of digression . . . and thereby a way of observing the reversibility of the structures from which the text is woven: it starts the text instead of assembling it” (S/Z 12–13).

By devoting separate chapters to literary works and cinematic adaptations, I do not mean to suggest that I adhere to the paratextual order of separation, succession, and closure while advocating hybridism, cross-fertilization, and a hermeneutics of process. The space of the chapter simply affords the step-by-step approach that permits Barthes’s *slow reading*, a sustained engagement with (some of) the intertextual, intermedial, and adaptive practice at play *within* each work, as well as *across* each literary and cinematic expression. In this context the encounter between fiction and film is no longer limited to two interlocutors but engages a polyphony of intersecting voices. Following Dudley Andrew’s suggestion that adaptation studies should take on “the complex interchange among eras, styles, nations and subjects” (“Adaptation” 37), I contextualize literary and cinematic narratives within their *own* historical, institutional, and cultural environments. I also recognize that these narratives convey meaning through shared and specific aesthetic traits (Cardwell 68). Consistently with the interpretive eclecticism that marks the field of adaptation studies, my analysis draws from different critical approaches, each coming into play in response to one of the many voices of the works in question. In the Gadamerian spirit that inspires this book, I do not hold the conceit to “complete” the task of interpretation. Nor do I seek to “put myself into brackets” and gloss over my own cultural and institutional formation and training. Rather, I hope these pages will motivate further questions and facilitate novel encounters—in a broader hermeneutical horizon, a more inclusive agoraic space.

“Fear Death by Water”

The Postman Always Rings Twice and the Frauds of Memory

Madame Sososttris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor.

.
I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.

T. S. ELIOT, “THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD”

Linear, fast-paced, and briskly economic, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* has been consistently praised (or chastised) for its no-nonsense, antiliterary inspiration. Immediately after its publication in 1934, Harold Strauss, the *New York Times* book review critic, argued that *The Postman's* success was due entirely to one quality: its brevity. “Cain can get down to primary impulses of greed and sex in fewer words than any writer we know of. He has exorcised all the inhibitions; there is a minimum of reason, of complexity, of what we commonly call civilization, between an impulse and its gratification” (“A Six-Minute”). Strauss’s prejudicial assumption here is that a simple story (boy meets girl, girl murders husband, boy and girl run away, girl is killed, boy goes to jail) found its configuration in an equally simple discursive framework. In spite of the novel’s laconic and craftily shallow style, this is, indeed, not the case of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Cain’s novel delves deeply, if rebelliously, into the archetypal narrative reservoir of Western literature, and its terseness highlights, rather than precludes, the looking-glass effects that disrupt the narrative’s deceptively uncomplicated linear progress.

Critics have remarked, if cursorily, on the mythical foundation of *The Post-*

man Always Rings Twice. Stoddard Martin describes this short novel as Cain's "characteristic adaptation of the *Tristan* myth to the thriller"—obviously referring to the tragic "love" triangle, the fatality of the lovers' inescapable and elemental passion, and the deceptions they practice to both hide and pursue their tryst (154). From another angle Allison Graham reads *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as a recasting of the Oedipus myth, concentrating on the modern, post-Freudian rendition of the themes of the Father's murder, the Mother's seduction, and the wanderings of the outcast hero (47–62). While these interpretations are convincing, they tell only part of the story. Cain does not single out a specific myth and follow its archetypal blueprint, according to the "mythical method" of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example, which sustains an expanded parallel with Homer's *Odyssey*. Rather, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* exploits mythical tropes and symbolic imagery by weaving them into an intricate tapestry of recurring patterns and echoing designs that challenges the bare-bones linearity of the conventional action thriller, rich in guns and gore but lacking formal complexity.

The novel's title, as well as its setting (the Twin Oaks Tavern), kicks off the duplicative system that, with its alternating system of foreshadowing and recurrence, analogy and opposition, superimposes a layer of symbolic meanings over the literal circulation of sense.¹ Cain thus evokes the archetypal connotations of often-familiar images and gives a broader scope to the narrator's first-person memoir. Arguably, one of the most conspicuous antisyntagmatic devices in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, that of doubling, or—with more complex implications—mirroring, points back to the basic symmetries of mythical structures.² However, Cain's artful mixing of metaphorical (paradigmatic) and metonymical (syntagmatic) narrative dimensions occurs through a sustained strategy of ironic estrangement. Repetition in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* does not imply the simple return of the same but, rather, entails a displaced symmetry, a reappearance that both affirms and negates itself (Deleuze, *The Logic* 262). Cain mimics the generic conventions of the memorialistic genre only to betray its implicit promise of narrative truth and confessional self-revelation. By means of carefully orchestrated recurrence, Cain evokes two illustrious *mythèmes* (the archetypal imagery of water and the trope of the road) in order to undermine their time-honored connotations and correct the meanings that the West has conventionally attached to them. And when a recurring image, that of a cat, carries its rippling echo-effect beyond the narrative space of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, intertextual analogies emerge

that further confirm Cain's ironic inspiration. In its sustained and transformative dialogue with standardized forms, genres, and tropes, Cain's novel is, in itself, an adaptation, in Fischlin and Fortier's broad interpretation of the term. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* inspires a reading experience that, by taking part in Cain's estranging process of appropriation and alteration of shared narrative materials, invites us to reassess sanctioned cultural "givens" and the aesthetic forms that have traditionally expressed them.

Memorialistic Self-revelation and the (Other) Truth of the Plot

The Postman Always Rings Twice begins in medias res, with the first-person narrator, a twenty-four-year-old tramp named Frank Chambers, providing no self-introduction or background information that could help his readers to contextualize his narrative account:

They threw me off the hay truck about noon. I had swung on the night before, down at the border, and as soon as I got up there under the canvas, I went to sleep. I needed plenty of that, after three weeks in Tia Juana, and I was still getting it when they pulled off to one side to let the engine cool. Then they saw a foot sticking out and threw me off. I tried some comical stuff, but all I got was a dead pan, so that gag was out. They gave me a cigarette, though, and I hiked down the road to find something to eat.

That was when I hit this Twin Oaks Tavern. (3)

This abrupt opening ushers in a quick-paced narrative that recounts Frank's affair with Cora, the wife of the Twin Oaks's owner, Nick Papadakis, a Greek immigrant whom they plot to kill so they can live together. Unknowing beneficiaries of the scams of human justice, Frank and Cora escape punishment for Nick's murder and regain their freedom together with the ten thousand dollars of Nick's life insurance policy. Yet the fateful circle inexorably closes on them when Frank accidentally kills Cora by crashing their car on a Santa Monica highway, thus tragically ending their botched journey to freedom. It is only in the novel's last chapter that we catch up with the narrator's present and find Frank in jail, awaiting execution for Cora's "murder." "I never confessed anything" (115), writes Frank as he conveys his last wishes to Father McConnell, the Catholic priest who assists the inmates on death row. These wishes are that Father McConnell burn Frank's memoir if he gets a commuta-

tion of sentence, so no potential evidence against him remains in print. The priest is to hold onto the memoir if there is a stay of execution, and to have it published if the execution goes through.

By building *The Postman Always Rings Twice* on the fiction that we are reading the last wishes of a man who is no more, Cain adds a layer of pathos to Frank's memoir. The confessional tone that pervades the present in which the narrative act takes place carries forth a presumption of truth, highlighted by the absolving participation of the religious authority and the sense of finality that marks Frank's experiential journey. Frank's impassioned avowals to his readers invite us to become part of his emotional landscape, and we get the impression of a man who is baring his soul and making peace with his violent past: "I'm getting up tight now, and I've been thinking about Cora. Do you think she knows I didn't do it? After what we said in the water, you would think that she would know it. But that's the awful part, when you monkey with murder. Maybe it went through her head, when the car hit, that I did it anyhow" (115).

Henry Bacon argued that Cain's inspiration in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is fundamentally ironic: "a man is acquitted of an actual murder, then finds himself charged with murdering a mere accident victim" (16). Irony is undoubtedly one of Cain's signature narrative strategies, but I suspect that it does not work here in the way that Bacon envisions. Bacon falls prey to the hermeneutical fallacy that often accompanies the reading of autobiographical and memorialistic writing. As exemplified by one of the genre's seminal texts, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, memoirs carry forth an assumption of sincerity on the narrator's part: "I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man is myself" (Rousseau, *Confessions* 1).³ Setting the "fictional pact" as the polar opposite of the "autobiographical pact," Philippe Lejeune famously defined autobiography as the promise that an author makes to narrate his or her life (or segments of it) in a spirit of truth (3–30). By creating a fictional memoir, Cain complicates the autobiographical pact and estranges Lejeune's neat opposition between fiction and autobiography. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is a hybrid text that appears to promote confessional truthfulness by appealing to the memorialistic genre, yet it displays its own fictionality by underscoring the narrative strategies with which Cain constructs his characters' journey. Irony dwells in this double-voiced space where the implicit author's allusions often coexist, in

an *unbalancing* act, with the first-person narrator's discourse—one working as the demystifying reflection, or Nietzschean double, of the other.

The narrative's very point of departure, with its estranging arbitrariness and paradoxical status (an origin "in the middle" that implies its own *before*) subverts the inaugurational intentionality that conventionally shapes memorialistic beginnings. As Edward Said has pointed out, every author "knows that the choice of a beginning for what he will write is crucial not only because it determines much of what follows but also because a work's beginning is . . . the point at which, in a given work, the writer departs from all other works: a beginning immediately establishes a relationship with works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both" (*Beginnings* 3). The ironic beginning of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* contains the intimation that its narrative requires a double reading, one that both recognizes and reads against the codes of memorialistic writing.

A seasoned reader of memoirs cannot but notice that, unlike most autobiographers, Frank has no intention (or ability) to explore his inner world and investigate the motivations of his actions. In fact, Cain presents Frank as either pathetically unable or aggressively averse to seeing beyond surfaces, his own as well as other people's:

There's a guy in No. 7 that murdered his brother, and says he didn't really do it, his subconscious did it. I asked him what that meant, and he says you got two selves, one that you know about and the other that you don't know about, because it's subconscious. It shook me up. Did I really do it, and not know it? God Almighty, I can't believe that! I didn't do it! I loved her so, then, I tell you, that I would have died for her! To hell with the subconscious. . . . You know what you're doing, and you do it. I didn't do it. I know that. (116)

Frank's tramping existence revolves around the unmediated satisfaction of basic instincts and needs: food, sex, shelter. Besides his failures in the realm of self-analysis, Frank is congenitally dishonest. His entire memoir is a sustained display of lies, ruses, and betrayals. This complex network of deception involves all of Frank's relationships and stretches well beyond the lies necessary to initiate and maintain his affair with Cora. After the jury rules that Nick died following an automobile accident caused by Frank's and Cora's "criminal conduct" and recommends that they "be held for the action of the grand jury" (54), Frank meets Sackett, the district attorney. Frank has no qualms about fol-

lowing the district attorney's prompt to sign a complaint against Cora, stating that he, too, was a victim of Cora's carefully orchestrated plan to murder her husband to cash in his life insurance money (62–63).

At the arraignment in the magistrate court, after Katz (the defense lawyer) encourages the Pacific States Accident Assurance Corporation's representative to state that his company wishes to escape payment of the ten-thousand-dollar indemnity on the grounds that a crime has been committed, Katz surprises all by pleading Cora guilty. Dismayed by the discovery that Frank and Katz betrayed her, Cora is quick to pay them back by dictating a confession that she believes will inculpate Frank as much as herself. This statement, however, is legally useless: Katz tricks Cora by having her dictate it to a bogus cop, while he proceeds to investigate Nick's insurance situation more deeply. He finds out that, besides the new life insurance policy, Nick had two other automobile insurance policies: a ten-thousand-dollar new public liability bond with the Guaranty of California and an old ten-thousand-dollar public liability bond with Rocky Mountain Fidelity. Katz is elated to see that if Sackett were to convict Cora of murder, the Guaranty of California and Rock Mountain Fidelity would have to give Frank twenty thousand dollars. Following Katz's wily calculation, these two companies quickly agree to chip in five thousand dollars apiece to pay the Pacific States Accident Policy. In turn, the Pacific States agent sees that his company's financial advantage lies in his arguing now that no crime was committed. Cora and Frank are free with ten thousand dollars. Katz in turn is euphoric because he has outfoxed Sackett, with whom, we find out, he had bet one hundred dollars that he would win the case. The law thus reduces itself to self-indulgent gaming and legal shenanigans, regardless of people's innocence or guilt.

Throughout the novel morality is equally debased to self-serving pragmatism: "Who's going to know if it's all right or not, but you and me?" (17) Cora asks Frank when trying to convince him to murder Nick. "You and me," Frank echoes (17), sealing a bond that is doomed to be shattered as soon as their solidarity is no longer mutually advantageous. When Cora leaves town to attend her mother's funeral, Frank engages in a tryst with Madge Allen, a young puma trainer whom he casually met in a parking lot and follows to Ensenada, Mexico. Once back, he has Cora believe that he went to San Francisco, alone. Like "love," religion in Frank's and Cora's world consists of tawdry images and absurdly interchangeable clichés such as those that Frank uses to describe two

sexual encounters with Cora: "I kissed her. Her eyes were shining up at me like two stars. It was like being in church" (17); and "Her hair was falling over her shoulders in snaky curls. . . . She looked like the great grandmother of every whore in the world. The devil got his money's worth that night" (87).

In this context of opportunistic values, violated promises, and warped morality, a hint of possible regeneration seems to flow from the water imagery that Cain exploits in a series of astutely crafted recurrences culminating in Frank's last swim with Cora in the Pacific Ocean. Indebted to the generative implications of numberless water myths, we could interpret this last swim as a rebirth of sorts, a kind of secular baptism, anointing the lovers' vow of beginning a new life, away from all evil:

"While you were thinking about a way to kill me, Frank, I was thinking the same thing. Of a way you could kill me. You can kill me swimming. We'll go way out . . . and if you don't want me to come back, you don't have to let me. Nobody'll ever know. . . ."

She went ahead and I swam after her. She kept on going, and went a lot further out than she had before. Then she stopped and I caught up with her. She swung up beside me, and took hold of my hand, and we looked at each other. She knew, then, that the devil was gone, that I loved her. . . .

We started back, and on the way in I swam down. I went down nine feet. . . . I looked at the green water. And with my ears ringing and that weight on my back and chest, it seemed to me that all the devilment, and meanness, and shiftlessness, and no-account stuff in my life had been pressed out and washed off, and I was all ready to start out with her again clean and do like she said, have a new life. (110–11)

But this is not Frank and Cora's first pledge of a newly achieved wholesomeness. After the first botched murder attempt, while Nick is in the hospital with a fractured skull, the two lovers "cut for the beach" (28), where they engage in the same carefree frolicking and offer the same blissful promises to each other. "They gave her a yellow suit and a red cap," Frank reminisces. "She looked like a little girl. . . . We played in the sand and then we went way out and let swells rock us. I like my head in the waves, she liked her feet. We lay there, face to face, and held hands under water. . . . I thought about God" (28). It is precisely at this point that Cora and Frank vow to start a new life together, away from Nick:

"Just you and me and the road, Cora."

"Just you and me and the road."

"Just a couple of tramps."

"Just a couple of gypsies, but we'll be together." (29)

The rest of the narrative reveals how this promise goes unfulfilled, as Cora is unwilling to keep up with Frank's tramping style, and Frank chooses to leave her behind and proceed to San Bernardino, a railroad town where he hopes to "hop a freight east" (31). That plan fails too, and after quickly making and losing money at the pool table, Frank returns to Cora and to a new murder plot at the expense of the unsuspecting Nick.

In a plot carefully built on recurrence and repetition, it is hardly credible that the second dip in the Pacific Ocean may indeed constitute the longed-for turning point—the "cardinal function" ("nucleus") of Barthes's well-made narrative plot (*Image* 93–94). One is at least bound to suspect that, if Cora was a burden on the road the first time the two lovers attempted to run away together, a pregnant Cora would likely be a double burden to Frank's wanderlust the next time around. During their second stay at the beach, as Cora floats in the Pacific surf with Frank, a wave raises her up and she proudly exposes her swelling breasts and pregnant belly as harboring the seed of positive change: "Pretty soon my belly is going to get big, and I'll love that, and want everybody to see it. It's life. I can feel it in me. It's a new life for us both, Frank" (111). In spite of Cora's desperate assurance, analogies in setting and imagery cast doubt on her expectations of having reached the crucial crossroad in her life's journey—the transition point that transforms her narrative function (in Propp's sense) from killer into life-giver. Cain masterfully anticipates the futility of all hope of renewal by intersecting the two beach scenes with a hauntingly grotesque portrayal of Cora, as seen from Frank's point of view. The police have just brought the two lovers to Hollywood—the iconic domain of glamorous make-believe that Cora had naively hoped to join when she moved west after winning a beauty contest in Des Moines. But what Cora sees of Hollywood is only the interior of an undertaker business, where she is asked to identify Nick's corpse. By describing Cora as an eerie mix of animate and inanimate parts, Cain erodes Cora's maternal illusions *ante facto*, with all the prescient wisdom of a cruel puppet master: "She had on a blouse that the police matron had lent her, and it puffed out around her belly like it was stuffed with hay" (51).

From Nick's first brush with death in the bathtub to his fateful automobile accident on Malibu Lake Road, and from Cora's and Frank's swimming interludes to Cora's final demise on the Pacific Coast Highway, water holds a sinister countergenerative power in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. It glues the characters together, often echoing and foreshadowing their tragic fate. Cain thus pitilessly rewrites and reverses the baptismal archetype: in this sealed world there is no purging, no regeneration, no change. Given this narrative environment, Frank's flaunted last-minute moral turnabout and confessional honesty appear suspicious at best. Too insistent to be credible, Frank's doggedness in repeating that he did not kill Cora adds impetus to the recurring waves of deception and self-deception that mark *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, thus undermining the narrative's memorialistic claim of veracity. Furthermore, Cain both arouses and mocks his readers' sentimental fallacies at the novel's end. The most superficial narrative level features a Frank who concludes his memoir by melodramatically reiterating his undying love for Cora, protesting his innocence in her death, and looking forward to a second chance at a better life with her—in heaven. But, if Frank's confessional narrative builds a metonymic chain of self-defense arguments to counter the accusation that he may have murdered Cora, the text's metaphorical dimension, with its symbolic reversals and telling analogies, questions these very arguments at their core, thus revealing Cain's ironic voice behind his character's loud protestation.

"Whole," Aristotle claimed in a passage that Cain liked to cite, "is that which has beginning, middle, and end" (*Poetics* 30).⁴ Cain adopted Aristotle's progressive definition of dramatic plot in order to expose its paradigmatic core, forcing a collision between "the irreducibly diachronic character of every narrated story" and a network of relations of intersignification (Ricoeur 56). This insidious analogical and duplicative web enfolds Cain's quick-paced narrative teleology and expresses the mixture of tragic determinism and relentless inevitability in which the characters are trapped. In the preface to a collection of short stories entitled *Three of a Kind* Cain described the narrative technique that he adopted for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*: "[As] the dreadful venture became more and more inevitable, I strove for a rising coefficient of intensity. . . . The whole thing corresponded to a definition of tragedy I found later in some of my father's writings: that it was the 'force of circumstances driving the protagonists to the commission of a dreadful act'" (xiii). Cain's inevitability recalls Aristotle's claim that a tragedy's development must grow

out of the very structure of the plot “either by necessity or in accordance with probability” (35). In this sealed world, made of an action “which is complete and whole” (30), chance itself becomes predestination, and the accidental seems to occur as if by design. Akin to Aristotle’s *pathos*, Cain’s “commission of a dreadful act” throws light on one of the overarching themes of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, that of the tragic conflict between fate (“the force of circumstances”) and free will. Receptive to the lesson of Sophocles, Cain explored this tragic conflict with one of the leading mythèmes of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*: the trope of the road.

The Myth of the Open Road and Its Historical Demise: London, Sinclair, and Dos Passos

In mythical paradigms the road objectifies the process of identity building, each crossroad corresponding to an existential choice in the hero’s itinerary of self-definition—each choice at the crossroads carrying the suspicion of a fateful predestination. Cain appropriated this myth in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and resolutely shifted the balance between individual free will and “the force of circumstances” toward the latter pole. Frank’s drifting has no liberating connotations but emphasizes, instead, a sense of moral debacle, loss of direction, and atrophy of the will.⁵ Goal-oriented travel turns into aimless wandering, while chance events, fateful recurrences, and a pervasive sense of doom foil individual self-reliance and personal accountability.⁶ The road has no spiritual gifts to bestow on its deplorable knight-errant and no material riches with which to reward his dispossessed *picaro*.

To understand Cain’s subversive adaptation of the road trope, one must also examine it in the historically specific context of 1930s America. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice* Cain challenged one of the metaphors upon which American civilization defined itself: the “Open Road” that Walt Whitman sang of with optimistic self-reliance in the epic lines of *Leaves of Grass*:

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune—I myself am good fortune;
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticism,
Strong and content, I travel the open road.

.
You road I enter upon and look around! . . .
.

Here the profound lesson of reception, nor preference nor denial;
The black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseas'd, the illiterate person, are
not denied;
The birth, the hasting after the physician, the beggar's tramp, the drunkard's
stagger, the laughing party of mechanics,
The escaped youth, the rich person's carriage, the fop, the eloping couple,
The early market-man, the hearse, the moving of furniture into the town, the
return back from the town,
They pass—I also pass—anything passes—none can be interdicted;
None but are accepted—none but shall be dear to me.

(“SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD” 1-29)

D. H. Lawrence eloquently defined these lines as Whitman's “leaving of the soul free unto herself, the leaving of his fate to her and to the loom of the open road” (183). In this brave freedom Lawrence saw “the exultant message of American Democracy . . . full of glad recognition, full of fierce readiness, full of the joy of worship when one soul sees a greater soul” (187). Cain's sinister adaptation of Whitman's ebullient and inclusive gospel both repeats and distinguishes itself from other influential indictments of the failed promises of the American dream. I am specifically referring to that socialist trinity—Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and John Dos Passos—that earned the boundless admiration of the Italian neorealist intellectuals during the *ventennio*. Each of these authors used the road trope to portray the struggle of a proletarian hero caught between determinism and freedom. Although in different ways and with varying outcomes, London, Sinclair, and Dos Passos use this struggle to make a statement of political and social engagement that is blatantly absent in Cain's lonely and individualistic world.

A mixed and unresolved trope, the road according to London is both the picaresque realm of creative adventure and original self-expression (Huck Finn's famed “territory ahead of the rest” [Twain 307]) and the mercilessly de-

terministic space where an exploitative system of “monstrous selfishness and sodden materialism” (London, “What Life” 399) discards its work force when it is no longer needed. London’s pages include indignant tales of youths mutilated or killed by boxcars’ wheels; of aging tramps succumbing to hunger and cold; of panhandlers sentenced to forced labor in convict camps; of hoboes beaten by police, wounded by “shacks” (railroad brakemen), and jailed without trial. London sees the road as the gathering place for the “surplus labor army” that is the unavoidable “economic necessity” of the capitalist system. Since there are more men than there is work for them to do, London argues, the struggle for work between the members of the surplus labor army is “sordid and savage.” At the bottom of the “social pit” are the victims—the waste products—of this system: the criminal and the tramp. The “road,” London concludes, “is one of the safety-valves through which the waste of the social organism is given off” (“The Tramp” 486).⁷

Undiscouraged by his own bleak analysis, London depicts many of the inhabitants of his “hobohemia”—to use the term coined by Sinclair Lewis—as irreverent and earthy young men endowed with inexhaustible energy and optimism. These “gipsy folk of this latter day” (“The Tramp” 486) share a flair for adventurous feats and scorn the “feminine” realm of the bourgeois drawing room and the numbing routine of the assembly line. To the gospel of progress and mechanized productivity—of life worked “on one same shift,” as Rudyard Kipling put in his *Sestina of the Tramp-Royal*—London juxtaposes the “protean face” of life on the road, where every day is “an ever changing phantasmagoria [where] the impossible happens and the unexpected jumps out of the bushes at every turn” (*The Road* 54). Tempering his dreary determinism, London describes the open road as the home of the man who “has learned the futility of telic endeavor and knows the delight of drifting along with the whimsicalities of Chance” (*The Road* 54).

Cain’s Frank Chambers shares the lack of end-oriented purpose of London’s characters, but, far from bestowing the gift of freedom, the chance that guides Frank’s life generates tragic outcomes. For London, chance is simply the fickle goddess who can deal both favorable and inauspicious hands. In a tradition harking as far back as Boccaccio and Chaucer, London’s narratives focus on the individual’s ability to interact with the vagaries of a capricious fortune. Turning challenges into advantageous situations, overcoming enemies by physical strength and intellectual wit, building comradeships, and thriving in

a changing environment that can be both friendly and hostile are some of the skills that London's heroes learn to master while on the road.

Similarly, for Jurgis Rudkus, the Lithuanian immigrant hero of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), the road is a domain of transition and becoming, and the journey it inspires is one of conversion and self-discovery. The freedom of the road allows Jurgis to transcend the life of physical and moral degradation in the hell of Chicago's meatpacking district (Packingtown). This freedom is a way to reaffirm human agency against the deterministic subjection to the natural forces of heredity and the environment:

Jurgis was . . . a free man now, a buccaneer. The old *Wanderlust* had got into his blood, the joy of the unbound life, the joy of seeking, of hoping without limit. There were mishaps and discomforts—but at least there was always something new; and only think what it meant to a man who for years had been penned up in one place, seeing nothing but one dreary prospect of shanties and factories to be suddenly set loose beneath the open sky, to behold new landscapes, new places, and new people every hour! To a man whose whole life had consisted of doing one certain thing all day, until he was so exhausted that he could only lie down and sleep until the next day—and to be now his own master working as he pleased and when he pleased, and facing a new adventure every hour! . . .

He never asked where he was nor where he was going; the country was big enough, he knew, and there was no danger of his coming to the end of it. And of course he could always have company for the asking—everywhere he went there were men living just as he lived, and whom he was welcome to join. (242)

In *The Jungle* the road is not a mere way out of the deterministic circle. It is the path one must follow to reenter the circle, after acquiring the weapons to shatter it from within. Wiser, scarred and yet unvanquished, Jurgis returns to the urban jungle as a convert to the socialist cause, ready to fight for a "more humane, civilized, cooperative society" (Phelps 1). Like London's, Sinclair's tone is optimistic, and both authors share what Frederick Feied eloquently defined as "the ultimate confidence that the down-and-outers, the men of the shambles and the abyss, would live to see a better day, building a new and better society on the foundations of the old" (40).⁸ Like Cain, London and Sinclair turned upside down the "rags to riches" clichés of popular tales à la Horatio Alger and mocked the belief that moral value and hard work could and would produce material success in a land of plenty. Unlike Cain's how-

ever, their protagonists remain likable and positive human beings, cast in a sympathetic, even admiring, light. Though victims of an unjust system, they still witness the dawn of revolutionary change.

To understand Frank Chambers, one should consider the evolution of the road-bound characters in Dos Passos's massive trilogy *U.S.A.*⁹ Though they lack the drive and self-assurance of London's and Sinclair's characters, Dos Passos's Mac and Ben Compton are rebels "by birth and blood" (46), who take to the road out of economic need and a sense of political obligation. Their experiences prove, however, that an individual's courage and commitment alone are no longer sufficient to withstand the charge of capitalism and provide viable alternatives to the big trusts' economic hegemony.¹⁰ Mac and Ben help organize strikes, participate in rallies and free-speech fights, lend their skills to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and oppose the war drive while suspecting that theirs is, after all, a solipsistic rebellion, ineffective in the scale of the grand revolution that continues to elude its frustrated supporters. Rather than echoing London's belief in "the inevitability of socialism and the conviction that man can direct his destiny" (Feied 86), Dos Passos carries out "the notion that the social process is like a dance of blind atoms, a collision of blind forces, and that the direction of social development will be influenced less by human choice than by deep-rooted deterministic factors, too subtle to comprehend, too powerful to resist" (Feied 86).

In the final canvas of Dos Passos's massive triptych (*The Big Money*, 1936), the once militant Wobbly (as IWW members were called) morphs into the homeless and nameless "Vag," a pathetic and disillusioned young man whose empty stomach is the all-too-real reminder that his journey's apocalyptic conclusion is just "a hundred miles down the road" (*U.S.A.* 1183).¹¹ Frank Chambers and Vag embody the failure of the socialist belief in the possibility "for the individual, by entering into concert with others, to transcend fate, animal urges, and social forces" (Curti 763). More than in Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, isolated and deeply flawed individuals have no social consciousness, no moral center, and no political belief. Cain's adaptation of the trope of the road to the sociopolitical environment of Depression-era California rewrites one of the mythème's central concerns, that of the struggle between human agency and all forces outside of the self. With its use of recurrence and repetition, the novel also overturns the progressive and future-bound connotations of the open-road trope and creates a universe of ominous echoes and viscous duplications.

Of "Gossamer Fidelity": Poe's "The Black Cat" and Cain's Hellcats

One of the most extended repetitions in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* revolves around the image of cats.¹² The cat that is electrocuted in a fuse box during Cora's and Frank's first attempt to murder Nick foreshadows the death of Cora, whom Frank calls a hellcat. A mountain echo, doubling back Nick's tenor voice, haunts the lovers after Nick's death. This death, too, relates to Cora through the image of a cat: "His head cracked. . . . He crumpled up and curled on the seat like a cat on a sofa. . . . Then Cora, she gave a funny kind of gulp that ended in a moan. Because here came the echo of his voice. It took the high note, like he did, and swelled, and stopped, and waited" (67).

During the interrogation of the lovers, the legal jousting between Sackett and Katz doubles the idea of the corruption of justice, and it is worth remembering here that it is Katz, the feline lawyer, who convinces Frank to testify against Cora. Madge Allen, who doubles Frank's wildness, unknowingly mirrors Cora's and Frank's destructive clash of unbridled instincts and feelings of entrapment when she describes feline behavior:

" . . . I like pumas. I'm going to get an act together with them some time. . . . Jungle pumas. Not those outlaws you see in the zoos."

"What's an outlaw?"

"He'd kill you."

"Wouldn't they all?"

"They might, but an outlaw does anyhow. If it was people, he would be a crazy person. It comes from being bred in captivity." (94-95)

Few images are richer in symbolic connotations than those of cats. Cain dipped into a familiar reservoir of animal imagery when he used cats to evoke both domesticity and wildness and to create an atmosphere replete with obscure omens and strange anticipation. However, at least one meaningful literary antecedent, Poe's "The Black Cat," may have inspired Cain in a more explicit manner. As a palimpsest, "The Black Cat" reveals itself through half-effaced traces that emerge sporadically in Cain's "surface" narrative. However, the relationship established between the two texts is not one of occasional evocation but of Nietzschean doubling—one text both repeating and transforming its subversive double.

Like Cain's, Poe's story features an imprisoned first-person narrator who

writes his memoir as he awaits execution for the brutal murder of his wife: “to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me” (“The Black Cat” 199). Like Cain’s, Poe’s story suggests that behind a “more than . . . ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects” (“The Black Cat” 199) there exists a pattern of inexplicable recurrences and coincidences that deprive the narrator of agency and choice, while hurling a monstrous retribution upon him, in spite of all his efforts to escape punishment. Unlike Cain’s, however, Poe’s manipulative narrator is subtly aware of the constructive (as opposed to merely reflective) power of the “most wild, yet most homely narrative” that he is “about to pen” (199). Moreover, unlike Cain’s, Poe’s narrator presents himself as a careful, dispassionate, and objective examiner of his own character and inner disposition. Consistent with the memorialistic pact, we receive the impression of a man baring even the most secret and painful sides of his soul to his sympathetic readers: “During [those years] my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence” (200).

The narrator’s tale appears to be an honest chronicle of his moral degeneration as a result of his addiction to alcohol. He recounts how, after addressing his drunken rage against his wife and his household pet, a black cat named Pluto, he proceeded to slip a noose around the cat’s neck and hanged it from a tree. The very night following Pluto’s murder, a fire destroyed the narrator’s house, with the exception of one wall, where the image of a black cat with a noose around its neck appeared as if “graven in *bas relief*” (202). “The impression,” the narrator writes, “was given with an accuracy that was truly marvellous” (202). He describes his attempts to emplot this inexplicable event into a logical explanatory structure, while emphasizing how facts escape such naive ordering efforts: “I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am dealing with a chain of facts, and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect” (202).

The ensuing explanation seeking to justify rationally the appearance of the ominous image on the wall loses hermeneutical power in the web of inexpli-

cable repetitions that mark the rest of the narrative. With its multiple reincarnations and reappearitions, Pluto orchestrates the fateful recurrences that, in their relentless succession, bring about the murderer's demise. The narrator relates how, one day, another black cat, "closely resembling [Pluto] in every aspect but one" (203), entered his household by sheer chance and replaced the murdered pet. The only difference between the "original" and its "copy" was a large splotch of white hair on the second cat's breast—a splotch that the narrator slowly came to see as evoking the image of the gallows. Caught between the repetition of past atrocities and the anticipation of future doom, the narrator presents himself as the victim of a demonic spell prompting him to continue to repeat the same acts of violence, which climax in the murder of his wife, who had tried to protect the defenseless cat against her husband's fury.

In the course of his narrative the protagonist hints at two possible explanations for his murderous behavior. One imparts all enigmatic events to natural causes: there are no fateful and unearthly recurrences, only the hallucinations of the intoxicated protagonist. The horror belongs to this world and is not unique to the narrator. Called "perverseness," it is a commonly shared trait of the human species, "one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man" (201). The movement of the narrative, however, craftily undermines this very logic. The narrator may, indeed, be an alcoholic prone to insane acts of violence, but this is not enough to explain all the uncanny recurrences that ensnare him and his family. Pluto's "returns" deprive the protagonist of the freedom of choice while bringing about retribution and punishment: as hellish *deus ex machina*, the black cat ultimately leads the police to the wife's tomb, and the narrator is sentenced to death for her murder.

In Tzvetan Todorov's categorization of the genre of the fantastic, the first interpretive option would give shape to an "uncanny" narrative. Unexplained events and weird phenomena are such because of an "illusion of the senses" and ultimately can be reduced to natural causes (the perceiver is dreaming, mad, drugged, intoxicated, being tricked, etc.) (*The Fantastic* 25). The second interpretation would instead construct a "marvelous" narrative: the devil, in cat shape in our case, does, indeed, exist, and we must admit that our world, no longer familiar, functions according to laws that belong to the supernatural and are, therefore, "unknown to us" (*The Fantastic* 25). Uncertainty between the two, Todorov famously claimed, generates the fantastic: an oscilla-

tion between the “homely” and the “wild” that does not tip the scale in either direction. In Poe’s “most wild, yet most homely narrative” (199), the narrator insists that he is neither mad nor dreaming, though he readily confesses his drinking habits.¹³ We find ourselves unable to decide whether “the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or . . . he really exists, precisely like other living beings” (*The Fantastic* 25).

In “The Black Cat” the narrator’s alleged failure to explain the play of fateful recurrences exonerates him from the burden of responsibility, as he exploits the recursive structure of his carefully constructed memoir to extort either an absolution in the name of the marvelous or a “stay of execution”—so to speak—in the name of the fantastic. Let us now return to the beginning of the story: “For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief” (199). The reversed mirror image of this astutely litotic clause reads in the affirmative: “I expect and solicit disbelief.” Indeed, the narrator counts on our inability to *believe* (as the result of a process of rational understanding) or, at least, on our persistent uncertainty and doubt. He needs his narrative to be unbelievable, either *out of this world* (the marvelous) or oscillating on the borderline between belief and disbelief (the realm of the fantastic) to win exculpation, in spite of his confession of murder.

Violence is at the core of “The Black Cat.” As part of the story, it is directed against subjected figures (animals, women) and climaxes in the narrator’s curt confession: “[I] buried the axe in her brain” (205). Violence is also embedded in the narrator’s discourse. The term *pen* that he repeatedly invokes as both noun and verb is indeed a weapon (think of the pen-knife with which the narrator gauged out one of Pluto’s eyes) that controls a discourse of and about violence. In “The Black Cat” violence is both physical and psychological. Readers are subjected to the narrator’s hermeneutical violence, as he builds a narrative aiming at winning absolution via rhetorical exploitation. The ironic double of this unreliable narrator is the implicit author. As he draws attention to the narrator’s act of writing, Poe exposes the narrator’s superbly manipulative narrative craft. As Christopher Benfey notes, “Poe wants us to divine a connection between violence and the act of writing” (36). The very unreliability and controlling nature of the narrator-protagonist sharpens the readers’ hermeneutical skills and challenges one of the requirements of the fantastic, the “integration of the reader into the world of the characters” (Todorov, *The Fantastic* 31). Poe thus invokes a different kind of “disbelief” (a withdrawal of faith or trust) via a character who demonstrates absolute lack of empathy

for the suffering of living creatures and of remorse for their deaths. Thus, Poe encourages us to question the narrator's marvelous or fantastic hypotheses and invites us back into the strange, but very real, world of a literary gifted and controlling psychopath (the Nabokov of *Lolita*, with its monstrously double Humbert Humbert, was, after all, a careful reader of Poe).

Cain's depiction of an (apparently) unmanipulative and guiltless narrator reveals all its ironic undercurrents when set against the disturbing palimpsest of Poe's short story. Although Poe's narrator laconically states his culpability while Frank's insists on proclaiming his innocence, both protagonists tell tales of captivity, abjection, violence, deceit, and madness. By summoning all the cynical authority of his literary predecessor, Cain undermines the principles of human worth and perfectibility, self-reliance, and individual autonomy that had sustained the American dream since its inception. However, Cain's story does not evoke "The Black Cat" by way of analogy only. Set against its nineteenth-century palimpsest, Cain's novel reveals none of the gothic paraphernalia that Poe's narrator so craftily used to plant the suspicion that supernatural forces influence human actions. In an all-human world the question of moral accountability depends exclusively on the individual and his or her relationship to a specific environment. Unlike Poe's clever narrator, Cain's characters are unreflective cogs in an inexplicable sociohistorical mechanism that entraps them in its obscure workings. These obscure workings are all the more sinister because the marvelous cannot be invoked in order to justify them or to explain them away. Whether fueled by deterministic causality or chance recurrences, this mechanism leaves the individual no way out: at the extreme border of the American continent Cain's road allows for no revolutionary crossing, and water yields no redemptive salvation. It is precisely this unsettling, yet entirely human, frontier that hosts the adaptive encounter between *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and Visconti's *Ossessione*.

Myth in the Mirror of History

The Rules of Fate and the Responsibilities of Choice in Visconti's *Ossessione*

During those years of study, we realized that [North] America was not *another* country, a *new* beginning of history, but simply the gigantic stage where the drama of all humankind was being played with more frankness than anywhere else.

CESARE PAVESE, *IERI E OGGI*

Commentators have often remarked that Luchino Visconti owed to his cinematic mentor, Jean Renoir, the seminal idea for his film *Ossessione* (1943).¹ During a stay in Paris in the mid-1930s, Renoir gave Visconti a “cinematographic scrapbook” of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.² These same commentators, however, unanimously dismiss *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as a “very casual” influence on Visconti’s all-Italian tragedy of isolation, murder, and greed, and they downplay Visconti’s participation in the debates on American literature that involved numerous Italian antifascist intellectuals in those years (Ferrero 18).³ Gian Piero Brunetta, for example, argues that, while neorealist novelists such as Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese were exploiting the narrative strategies and sharing the ideological premises of contemporary American fiction, neorealist filmmakers such as Visconti and his group preferred instead to remain within the tradition of the great European classics (35).⁴ Given these differences in their literary interests, Brunetta concludes that there never was a direct connection between neorealist novelists and neorealist filmmakers.⁵ Though convincing in consideration of Visconti’s oeuvre, Brunetta fails to account for *Ossessione*, which contradicts his interpretation.

A shared interest in American fiction marks both the commonly considered "protoneorealist" film *Ossessione* and neorealism as a literary movement.⁶ Visconti's encounter with American literature paralleled Vittorini's and Pavese's. Pavese acknowledged his indebtedness to *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in *Paesi tuoi* (1941), the first-person narrative of an ex-convict (modeled on Cain's Frank Chambers), who becomes the witness of a rural tragedy of violence, incest, and murder (*Vita* 218). In spite of fascist censorship of all of his critical introductions, Vittorini's influential anthology of American narrative, *Americana* (1942), became the vehicle for a momentous intellectual encounter with American cultural materials, an encounter that was shaped by an intense political and ideological agenda.⁷

Visconti's serendipitous opportunity to borrow *The Postman Always Rings Twice* from Giorgio Bassani, in order to read it in the original language while shooting the Ferrara scenes of *Ossessione*, may have been too belated to alter the film's script in significant ways, as Giuseppe De Santis observed.⁸ Nevertheless, it demonstrates that Italy was not as culturally impervious to American influences as the regime wanted it to be.⁹ By arguing that *Ossessione* was "an isolated and self-sufficient episode," critics echo Visconti's tendency to minimize Cain's influence on *Ossessione* and thus support the belatedly romantic prejudice of *auteurist* genius and originality.¹⁰ Even when connecting the film's genesis to the early intellectual partnership between Renoir and Visconti, interpreters lose sight of the rich set of encounters, contacts, and exchanges that constitute the subversive inspiration of this film. They thus fail to appreciate the intellectual curiosity and sophisticated antifascism allying Visconti with the many dissident voices that, throughout the *ventennio*, disrupted the regime's program of ideological hegemony, denounced its complacent political forgeries, and strove to unlock Italy's sealed cultural borders.¹¹

Like Vittorini's and Pavese's, Visconti's journey to America occurred on purely intellectual grounds through the pages of "forbidden books." By transposing Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to the cinematic medium, Visconti shared their effort to adapt America to the Italian soil and thus reinvent it. For these intellectuals America was both a polar opposite and a mirror image: an *elsewhere* polemically inverse to the rose-colored surfaces of fascist Italy and an *everywhere* reflecting shared human experiences—a space where history and myth, the particular and the universal, and politics and literature came together, in "a story . . . that delves deep into history and transcends it at the same time."¹² Lino Micciché based his insightful reading of *Ossessione*

on the argument that Visconti placed his characters in both “a real *Zeitraum*, a kind of ‘lived present’ . . . that enhances the richness of . . . its naturalistic flavor [and] a sort of symbolic limbo, where they all become as many archetypes of themselves.”¹³ *Osessione* thus shifts back and forth from a dimension of “metonymic everyday immediacy” to one of “metaphoric mythical abstraction” (Visconti 49). While Micciché’s analysis is both meticulous and illuminating, it nevertheless fails to point out that, long before becoming the exegetical key to *Osessione*, this unique amalgam of realistic facts and transhistorical archetypes was the crucial feature of American literature *tout court*, according to its Italian neorealist interpreters. The significance of Visconti’s *Osessione*, and the evidence of his sustained dialogue with Italian neorealist writers, rests precisely on his adaptive engagement with the “metonymic” and “metaphoric” dimensions of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. As one of many dissident intellectuals in fascist Italy, he viewed Cain’s novel in light of a wider intertextual and intermedial dialogue with America as a sociopolitical, aesthetic, and cultural image.

Chance and Choice in Visconti’s Tragic World

Visconti’s adaptive work in *Osessione* responds to the effort of measuring the lasting impact of mythical patterns (what Claude Lévi-Strauss called the “permanent structures” of myth, and Northrop Frye the “archetypal structural principles”) (Lévi-Strauss 232; Frye 123) as they translate themselves across specific, yet varied, historical and political situations. Visconti tailored some of *Postman’s* mythical archetypes and themes to a specifically Italian *tranche de vie*. By borrowing the configurational architecture of classic tragedies, with their meaningful symmetries and essential plotlines, Visconti evoked a shared literary patrimony, and the silent formal analogies that he produced bore the weight of some of his most provocative ideological messages. Opting for representative modes based on recurrence and association, Visconti developed the “operatic” patterns of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and used indirection and metaphor to give a broader scope and meaning to the plight of the Italian people under fascism. Visconti also emulated Cain’s ironic stance, as his adaptation of archetypal imagery and mythical structures to the historical reality of fascist Italy resulted in their grotesque distortion and cynical reversal.

In *Osessione* Visconti followed Cain’s plotline, but he condensed the au-

thor's tightly knit story even further.¹⁴ There is no death row closing sequence, and the first-person memoir is replaced by a flexible interplay of point-of-view and objective shots that emphasize the interactions (and power struggles) among the characters rather than focus on the subjective perception of a single individual.¹⁵ Visconti also eliminated Cain's first, botched murder attempt and reduced the police investigation to a few details involving the victim's life insurance policy.¹⁶ Cain's extraordinary conciseness, variously attributed to the influence of Hemingway's style and his own training in journalism, turns, with Visconti, to reflect the terse essentiality of Greek drama. This absolute economy heightens the intensity of the plot and underscores Visconti's interest in the clash between necessity and freedom—between the rule of chance and the responsibilities of human choice. As Pio Baldelli aptly pointed out, *Ossessione* "provides the scenic structure of an ancient tragedy, which, with a few spatial reductions, could take place and become alive on the stage as well."¹⁷

In *Ossessione* "the dreadful act" becomes the core of the entire *muthos* and occupies the center of the plot. In accordance with classical theatrical conventions that prevented violent events from being portrayed directly, Visconti left the murder offstage. Not only is Bragana's murder not represented, but it is never mentioned directly, only referred to in cryptic statements and symbolic acts of foreshadowing, as is appropriate for the great classic taboos, including kin-killing and the violation of the host-guest relationship.¹⁸ Visconti's formal choice of classic *decorum* differentiates *Ossessione* from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, leaving—ironically—all explicitness to the novel (Cain matter-of-factly combines the description of Nick's murder with the disturbing sex scene between Frank and Cora, beside Nick's dead body).¹⁹

Visconti's ellipsis also reconfigures the *pathos* in terms of parody. If the tragic event par excellence, the *mythème* of the murder of the king or of the father, is granted all dignity imposed by strict adherence to classic rules, Bragana himself cannot convincingly fit into a king's robe. Authoritarian and misogynistic with Giovanna, and paternalistically affable with Gino—he calls himself a *camerata* when encouraging Gino's male friendship—Bragana remains gullible, unlikable, and at the time of death, repulsively drunk. Visconti's use of classic conventions implies a significant subtext, one that uses all the disruptive force of parody when evoking the analogical superimposition of the order and integrity of the family with that of the state that was customary in Greek tragedy. The family in *Ossessione* becomes the apt counter-



Figure 2.1. *Osessione*. Opening credits.

point of the film's (apparent) great absentee: the fascist state.²⁰ Thus, Visconti invests the ellipsis at the core of *Osessione* with multiple layers of meaning. Allusion, metaphor, and parodic reversals furnish the key to the surreptitious circulation of the film's ironic transgressions.

Repeating Cain's subtle use of archetypal narrative structures and mythical tropes, Visconti set *Osessione's* beginning, middle, and end in one of Cain's most symbolically pregnant spaces, the road. In *Osessione's* opening sequence, traditionally interpreted as Visconti's homage to Renoir's signature use of lengthy shots, Visconti "Italianized" Cain's Californian roads—the *statale polesana* between Codigoro and Ferrara becoming the counterpart of Cain's barren highways—and foreshadowed some of *Osessione's* fundamental themes.²¹ Identifying with the camera eye, the viewer occupies the seat of a moving truck. The field of vision is encased tightly by the truck's windshield, which creates the confining effect of a frame-within-a-frame (fig. 2.1). The landscape enclosed within this frame, however, is remarkably open in its flat, disconcerting emptiness. In spite of the shot's apparent symmetries, with the

long road dividing the land on the right from the water on the left, the over-riding visual effect is not one of harmonious stability but rather imbalance. The truck appears tilted toward the right, and the thick metal bar dividing the two halves of the windshield prevents full view of the left side of the road. The same metal bar shifts the picture's compositional weight toward the left.

The truck's linear progress appears deceptive. While the truck's jolting motion and the sequence of three approaching road signs suggest forward motion, the landscape's monotony and the sense of delay we experience in reaching the oncoming bends in the road leave the impression of always being in the same place. The jarring soundtrack, chromatic contrasts of blacks and whites, and the vapor rising from the hood and impairing our vision, all contribute to a feeling of entrapment and lack of control. Visconti's apparently realistic establishing shot craftily guides the viewer's expectations by offering a formal commentary on its own subject matter (the film's self-reflexivity is immediately evident, as the truck's windshield functions like a replica of the movie screen's frame). The unobtrusive expressiveness behind the apparently stark and matter-of-fact *mise-en-scène* thus allows Visconti to foreshadow some of the film's tragic dualities, namely those between movement and stasis, freedom and entrapment, individual autonomy and the obscure force of destiny.

In the sequences building up to the central ellipsis of Bragana's murder, Visconti repeats the opening sequence: a truck, an open road, and, reaching the climax point, the same ominous music. This time, however, he places the camera outside the truck, providing a medium three-shot of Gino and Giovanna sharing cramped truck cab space with Bragana's expansive body, which jolts around in merry singing and drunken demeanor. After Bragana stops to vomit, Gino takes the wheel, at Giovanna's instigation. The next shot captures the truck from behind, as it moves away toward an oncoming curve in the road. By never shooting from inside the truck, and by showing the truck getting more remote as it withdraws from us, Visconti limits our participatory position as compared to the opening sequence. We are not part of the action but detached spectators. At this point a rapid fade-out and fade-in sequence frame the central ellipsis, the passage of time marked by the sudden change from night to daylight. The following shot of the overturned car at the bottom of the embankment fills in the missing details far more eloquently than Gino, whom we see explaining to the police and the crowd of bystanders what has just happened.

In the last scene, Visconti uses a by now familiar medium shot of the car's



Figure 2.2. The edge of the windshield cuts across the protagonists' jugulars, an ominous anticipation of the neck wound that will soon kill Giovanna.

interior to introduce Gino and Giovanna, finally alone, with Gino at the wheel and Giovanna pressing closely to his side (fig. 2.2). The two lovers share the same intimate space, their conversation focused on the future toward which they are driving:

GIOVANNA. This is life, Gino. . . .

GINO. Yes, this is life, finally away from that house. . . .

GINO. You'll see, everything will be fine. . . . And besides, destiny will help us. . . .

Stay calm. From now on, I'll take care of everything. . . .

GIOVANNA. (feverishly) "But, nothing can happen to me, right?"²²

The analogies created with the previous car sequences and the whole tragic buildup of the plot create dramatic irony by placing viewers at a higher level of awareness than the characters and allowing them to sense the discrepancy between the lovers' dialogue and what is likely to happen. Visconti shatters the lovers' intimacy by alternating this two-shot with views of what is ahead

and what is behind them. A slow-moving, heavily loaded truck, trudging along and enshrouded in its engine smoke, prevents Gino from speeding ahead. A police car gains ground from behind. With a high-angle shot of the lovers' car, Visconti makes the vehicle appear small and vulnerable, thus heightening the sense of impending doom.

While this relatively dynamic sequence creates a mounting tension, our greater knowledge limits our ability to identify fully with the characters: we literally see them from several perspectives, and the high-angle shot emphasizes a view from above. It is only at this point that Visconti allows us to observe what he concealed in the case of Bragana: death displays itself onstage. Visconti's "authorial control of intimacy and distance, the calibration of access to characters' knowledge and consciousness" provides *Ossessione's* distinctive pace and masterful denouement (Stam, "Introduction" 35) and marks Visconti's use of specifically cinematic codes that differ from Cain's use of a first-person narrative. Visconti astutely exploits and subverts what Seymour Chatman, in a seminal study of point of view in Renoir's *Une partie de campagne*, defines as the "interest point of view," the perspective of an audience that is invited to empathize and "become identified with the fate of a character," and thus share his or her emotional stance ("What Novels" 134).

Visconti orchestrates this interplay of participation and detachment in the climaxing final scene. We see Gino turning to look at Giovanna, who just asked him to pass the truck. As Gino downshifts, we expect him to move into the left lane to complete the maneuver. Instead, he swerves to the right and Giovanna grabs the steering wheel, screaming. The car crashes onto the guardrail and rolls down the embankment toward the water below. A merciless irony overturns Giovanna's plain moral economy ("Because we, who stole a life . . . can give back a new one")²³ as the suspicion that a desperate Gino may have deliberately—though without premeditation—caused the fatal accident cannot be dismissed. If Visconti's protracted close-up of Gino's and Giovanna's faces underscores human action and individual choices, the couple's position between police car and truck highlights their entrapment. Arguably, the similarities in the deaths of Bragana and Giovanna, which Visconti points out by analogies in setting and shots, follow the typical "retribution pattern" of Greek tragedy and carry out the plot's catastrophe, thus further accentuating the atmosphere of prefigured destiny (Burian 178–208). Unlike Greek tragedy, however, which implied a process of identification between audience and characters, Visconti's different camera placements in these scenes allow

the viewer to experience a sense of progressive emotional detachment and intellectual distance from the lovers and their tragic ordeal. Formal strategies here both exploit and undercut film's ability to address feelings "immediately, directly, and powerfully" (Boyum 27) and thus allow the kind of emotional detachment that directors such as Godard, Robert Bresson, and Jean-Marie Straub sought in order to force the audience to take a critical stance toward the materials. This is the cinema, in Sontag's words, "that detaches, that provokes reflection," where "the pull toward emotional involvement is counterbalanced by elements in the work that promote distance, disinterestedness, impartiality. [This is the cinema where] emotional involvement is always, to a greater or lesser degree, postponed" ("Spiritual Style" 177).

Overall, the analogies that Visconti created among the events placed in the three dominant narrative points of beginning, middle, and end imply Cain's idea of circular justice, the anticipatory setup that opens the film emphasizing the sense of fatality and futility of the will that crowns the last shot. For Gino and Giovanna the road is deceptively linear, and when it turns back on itself, it closes off all exits and escape routes. Mutually dependent on and yet set against each other, Giovanna and Gino are victims of obscure powers both *within* and *around* them: in his revision of the conventions of Greek tragedy, Visconti, like Cain, uses the trope of the road as an existential metaphor for the struggle between deeply flawed characters and overwhelming exterior forces.

It was with an interest in the symbolic valences of setting that Visconti and his collaborators chose the bleak outlines of the Po River delta for *Ossessione*. When comparing the "vast horizons of North America" with the landscapes of the Po River Valley, De Santis referred to the primitive, raw tones that Pavese was simultaneously discovering in the rural Langhe region of northwestern Italy (29). The primitivism of *Ossessione*, like that of Pavese, has little in common with the idea of fresh and new beginnings that had characterized so many representations of the American frontier. Obviously, De Santis could not refer to the exhilarating potential of a yet uncharted continent. On the contrary, like the "valley of ashes" in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, vastness here speaks of failed promises, a potential turned awry, the terrifying emptiness projected by "the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it" (Fitzgerald 21). Gianni Puccini had originally entitled Visconti's film *Palude* ("Swamp"), thus repeating Cain's ambient symbolism, that of California as a stagnant dead end, the last stop in a journey of physical,

spiritual, and social debacle.²⁴ Neither land nor water, but a contamination of both, Puccini's swamp becomes the objective correlative of his protagonists' psyches and the metaphor of a time-specific social malaise. Contrary to the Duce's depictions of the Italian Empire's wonderful and progressive destinies, this landscape mirrored the schizophrenia of a country that was being forced promises of spectacular achievements while having to deal with rampant economic depression and a sequence of military fiascos: Greece, Russia, and the East African Empire.

Reciprocal Self-Definitions and the Crisis of the Autonomous Self

Like Cain, Visconti rarely used events, characters, or objects in their singularity but, rather, employed them to foreshadow, recall, stand in for, or stand out against other characters, objects, or events, thus creating a pattern of oppositional or analogical doublings. Hemingway, of course, had furnished one of the most successful applications of this technique, which became, for Italian novelists, an effective tool to convey what they wanted to remain the *implicit* side of their artistic communication. In one of his introductory notes in *Americana*, Vittorini wrote that Hemingway's art had "a linear doubleness. Symbols are born . . . by elision, allusion, and recurring images," thus referring to a stylistic option that was at the source of his own iterative, symbolic, and "operatic" patterns in *Conversazione in Sicilia*.²⁵

While adopting the doubling and mirroring techniques that we find in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Visconti searched for original applications and avoided repeating themes specific to Cain. In *Ossessione* doubling engages the plot's macrostructure and, in turn, is reflected in specific filmic sequences. Unlike *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the plot of *Ossessione* is divided into two identical halves, separated by the visual caesura of Bragana's murder. By reflecting mirror images back onto each other, these two identical halves offer an apt configurational doubling of Giovanna's and Gino's mutual reflections.

In an incisive dismantling of the patriarchal myth of the singularity and autonomy of the self, Visconti used doubling and mirroring to define his characters' social and sexual identities. Three specific episodes—Gino's arrival at the *spaccio*, the postseduction scene in the Braganas' bedroom, and, as we will see in the next section, Lo Spagnolo's sequence in Ancona—use doubling and mirroring techniques to comment on the self's relational nature. In all



Figure 2.3. An overexposed close-up of Gino's face, from Giovanna's point of view, deceptively illuminates a bleak environment.

these episodes the relational dynamics of Visconti's couples (Giovanna and Gino, Gino and Lo Spagnolo) mirror broader trends, as "the self . . . reflects and refracts concrete social interactions in which it plays a part" (Burkitt 143) and becomes representative of the specific sociopolitical influences and material conditions of life during the last years of fascist rule in Italy.

In an effective rendition of the two protagonists' reciprocal self-definition, Visconti first photographs Gino in a series of three-quarter positions, or turning his back to the camera, thereby concealing his face, the prime marker of identity. Once inside the Braganas' dilapidated inn, Visconti presents Gino through partial shots focusing on single body parts and details of attire: his worn-out shoes, his tattered jacket. Upon approaching Giovanna's space, the kitchen, Gino is framed from her point of view: the camera tracks in to a close-up of Gino's illuminated face, as he looks at her, from what a previous reverse shot had established as her visual position (fig. 2.3).

A sudden lack of ambient sound emphasizes the power of the close-up to provide "the microdrama of the human countenance" (Bluestone 27). It

is only after Gino and Giovanna are locked together that Visconti employs more direct frontal shots, revealing Gino's unified physical identity. Paradoxically, Gino becomes a complete individual only through being subjected to another's identifying and interpretive gaze. William Van Watson has pointed out that this subjective camera identifies the audience's gaze with Giovanna's, thus reversing the conventional gender paradigm that Laura Mulvey famously explored in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Van Watson 85–86). Here, Giovanna is “given to adopt a masculine stance in relation to a sexually objectified, or eroticized . . . Gino” (Ginsberg 254). Visconti shows the male protagonist as the object of the female gaze and thus reverses the dynamics of perception at work in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, where it is Frank who unequivocally says, “I saw her” (fig. 2.4).²⁶

Though Van Watson's argument is convincing regarding this single frame, if one proceeds further, one sees that the same “identifying” argument can be made about Giovanna. After all, initially Giovanna is seen from Gino's point of view as the manifestation of a conventional masculine fantasy. She is sitting at a kitchen table painting her fingernails (fig. 2.4), carelessly swinging her legs and singing the refrain of a popular love song. This shot is particularly significant if we consider that in the rest of the film Visconti made Clara Calamai (who had previously played high-society roles that enhanced her beauty and glamour) look plain and unkempt.

Seen together, Giovanna and Gino are mirror images, according to the notion of Nietzschean doubling expounded in this book. The shifts in subject positions reveal that they exist, in desire, only in each other. But they are also polar opposites, existing *against* each other and vying for control, Giovanna embodying the seductions of domesticity and Gino the adventures of mobility. The dynamics of their desire mirrors the plot's macrostructure with its narrative progressions (Gino, the road, change, potential freedom, and, conventionally, the “masculine principle”) and closed, solipsistic returns (Giovanna, the home, sameness, potential security, the “feminine principle”).²⁷ The pressing question, at this point, is whether Visconti establishes this gender economy as universal or as relative to and dependent on specific sociohistorical conditions.

Visconti provides a partial answer by employing doubling and mirroring techniques in the postseduction scene in the Braganas' bedroom.²⁸ A profile shot shows Gino combing his hair in front of a small mirror, placed slightly below his eye-level. The reflection in the mirror does not show Gino's face but



Figure 2.4. Giovanna's first glance at Gino, seen from Gino's point of view. Visconti underscores the analogy between Gino and Giovanna by using identical lighting techniques.

the space behind him, with a diminutive Giovanna, reclining in bed in the background on the lower side of the frame (fig. 2.5).²⁹ By combining our view of Gino looking at himself in the mirror with that of Giovanna's frontal reflection, Visconti visualizes Cain's narrative presentation of the two characters as being mirror images of each other. At the same time, Visconti denounces the secondary and dependent position of woman, in the sociohistorical context in which Giovanna lives, even in relation to a socially marginal character like Gino. In this shot viewers are not looking at Giovanna directly but at her *image*, an objectified human being who, as we learn from her dialogue with Gino, had been forced to sell herself to passing men after she had lost her job. She had married Bragana as a desperate financial investment, thus institutionalizing her prostitution within the family's sacred confines.³⁰

Paralleling its beginning, this sequence ends with a close-up revealing Giovanna's and Gino's faces, reflected in a large mirror covering an armoire's door. As the camera captures the whole surface of the mirror, the relative posi-



Figure 2.5. These “mirror” images—highlighted by the almost identical position of the characters’ arms—present significant differences: supine and smaller, Giovanna’s body eloquently displays her marginal role in the patriarchal order.

tions of real and reflected bodies appear to shift. The mirror, with its reflected figures, occupies the entire frame, and the real human beings are shunted off camera. Viewers temporarily forget that they are looking into a mirror, and reflections become reality. Reified entities appearing as “real” engage in a tense dialogue the undertones of which refer to the yet unspoken planning of Bragana’s murder. This illusion disappears when the armoire’s door slowly opens, revealing the inside of Bragana’s closet, crammed full with his clothes. Visconti presents Bragana, in absentia, with a visual metonymy through his belongings: he *is* what he owns. Bragana’s material possessions are the specter haunting his room. The rotation of the mirroring door closes a vicious circle, marital love reduced to the law of economic give and take. Relative wealth robs Bragana of his life simply because the absolute lack of it had robbed Giovanna of a room of her own. Thus objectified and alienated, Giovanna will murder Bragana in order to turn herself into a mirror image of what she has destroyed. She will in fact replace Bragana as the innkeeper and attempt

to transform Gino into a handsome *homo œconomicus*—a better and younger Bragana—an impossible fusion of the careless expenditure of passion and the acquisitive rule of the cash register.³¹

Cultural Appropriations: The Italian Hobo and Visconti's Politics

It is an exegetical commonplace, by now, to celebrate the character of Lo Spagnolo as Visconti's most original departure from Cain's novel. Lo Spagnolo has been consistently interpreted as Giovanna's foil—his world being the exact opposite of the stifling existence at the Braganas' inn. In Lo Spagnolo's scenes, most critics argue, mobility replaces domesticity, free exchange substitutes selfish acquisition, and the foreshadowing of a more equal homosexual relationship takes the place of destructive heterosexual passion. Existential and economic mobility mark the philosophy of this itinerant performer. His nickname, denoting foreignness, his humanitarianism, and his sexuality place him outside of the fascist patriarchal order and on the side of the transgression of bourgeois mores.³² Both physically and intellectually, he is Bragana's opposite. According to Fernaldo Di Giammatteo, he is "Gino's alter ego."³³ Generally casting him in a positive light, Visconti critics imply that he may be an alter ego for Visconti as well, a romanticized rendition of his political and sexual orientations, if not of his socioeconomic background.

Though undoubtedly original in an Italian context, Lo Spagnolo is by no means unique if examined in a broader interart framework. If the open road was one of the founding tropes of American civilization, the hobo, or tramp, was its popular and subversive hero.³⁴ Visconti's name choice may in fact have been a discreet homage to Dos Passos, who briefly introduced, yet never developed, a homonymic character in one of the Charley Anderson chapters in *The 42nd Parallel*: "Charley worked on that rollercoaster all summer until the park closed in September. He lived in a little camp over at Excelsior with Ed Walters and a wop named Spagnolo who had a candy concession" (*U.S.A.* 314).

As many interpreters point out, Visconti's choice of the nickname Lo Spagnolo does not identify the character's nationality but obliquely hints at his politics by referring to his possible participation in the Spanish resistance movement. But the choice of a nickname was also the conventional way for the American hobo to define his tramping self as different from his legal, patronymic identity. In hobo parlance "monicas" (monikers)—Jack London

explained—were “the *nom-de-rails*” that hoboes selected for themselves or received from their fellow tramps.³⁵ Regardless of nationality or politics, Visconti's *Lo Spagnolo* reveals his *cultural* affiliation with a phenomenon, that of tramping, which had garnered attention since the 1870s in the United States. In North America, tramping was a consequence of the end of the great migration west, the closing of the frontier, and the series of ravaging economic crises (1873, 1890) that climaxed in the Great Depression of 1930. By 1930 American society had long acknowledged the presence of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, common laborers, dispossessed farmers, and railroad hands who drifted back and forth across the country by mastering the skills of “train hopping” and “riding the rods.” The subculture created by these penniless wayfarers quickly became a literary phenomenon, as the extraordinary success of Jack London's autobiographical sketches of his ten-thousand-mile journey among the “submerged tenth” demonstrated (“How I Became a Socialist” 364).

London portrayed himself as the quintessential American hobo, a defiant hero, and “a profesh who could ride the rails, outwit authorities, and ‘batter the drag,’ or panhandle, better than anybody else” (DePastino xi, xxiii). In London's narrative universe hoboing became a kind of sport, a test of endurance and skill that one underwent by choice and played according to self-imposed limitations and rules. Jack exploited his physical strength and intellectual wit to maintain his independence from mainstream laws and values while taking full advantage of them. London's hobo thus provided an estranging perspective on middle-class standards and mores and became the positive pole against which the hypocrisy, corruption, and vulgarity of the moneyed classes shone forth in grotesque and lurid glory.

As a reverse mirror image of London's tramps Visconti's vagabond ends up confirming, rather than subverting, the power of the system that he only superficially appears to challenge.³⁶ The lure of ostensive independence contrasts with intimations of confinement and marginalization on the part of the social whole. Far from extolling the carefree charm of life on the open road, Visconti's *Lo Spagnolo* demonstrates that his freedom is confined to the marginal reality of street fairs and carnivals, in provincial towns and beach resorts remote from the centers of power and authority.³⁷ Unlike that of Sinclair's and Dos Passos's itinerant workers, *Lo Spagnolo*'s ideology poses no concrete threat to the current political status quo. In *Lo Spagnolo*'s world, political utopianism is debased to his fortune-telling act, and his revolution-

ary potential remains caged in, just like his pet parrot, which Visconti, not without irony, named Robespierre. Contradicting Lo Spagnolo's implicit Marxist ideals, and in a situation that symbolically recalls Giovanna's physical and economic entrapment, we see Gino working with him at the San Ciriaco street fair in Ancona, carrying cumbersome sandwich boards that publicize an opera-singing contest as part of the festivity's events. Wrapped twice around his body ("a doppio giro," in Bragana's words), these placards represent utter reification, as Gino literally turns his body into a prop for advertisement (Visconti, *Ossessione* 61).

The emotional contract that Lo Spagnolo offers to Gino is as ambiguous as the financial one. It has been argued that Lo Spagnolo's act of solidarity when he pays for Gino's train fare exhibits his anticapitalist philosophy: "You see, Gino, money has legs and must walk. . . . Otherwise, if it stays in one's pocket it becomes moldy. . . . Instead you take a bite and then pass it on to someone else, who lives on it too. This is why with the money that is minted in Rome people eat . . . in Turin and Palermo."³⁸ Visconti has Lo Spagnolo express what, in the American context, has been defined as the "code of hobo ethics." Featuring comradeship and mutual assistance, this unwritten code firmly rejected the bourgeois work ethic based on individualism and competitive acquisition. "When one has money, he gives it to the man who needs it" was one observer's description of the hobo's economic rule "and when he is broke, he asks the price of a meal from the man who has it" (DePastino xxiv). This kind of reciprocity was particularly effective in early twentieth-century America where the "hobo army" had grown so imposing as to control entire districts in vibrant urban centers such as Chicago and San Francisco, Minneapolis and Baltimore. In these districts hoboes profited from an institutional network that offered services such as cheap lodgings, temporary job placement, meals, and various forms of entertainment, from theaters to brothels, gambling dens to saloons. In these hobo "jungles" men freely exchanged goods and information and were "shielded from the labor market" and the constraints of wage earning (DePastino xxiv-v). Fascist Italy did not allow for this kind of hobo subculture. While the regime took progressively more drastic measures against vagrants and gypsies, the support system available to the homeless in Italy was limited to religious institutions, the self-righteous and proselytizing thrust of which Vittorio de Sica masterfully portrayed well after the end of the regime in the memorable church scene of *Ladri di biciclette*. Both Gino and Lo Spagnolo (like Cain's Frank) are adrift and isolated, and Lo

Spagnolo's attempt to treat Gino to his "prosperity" appears pathetic at best and harboring a second motive at worst.

Recent interpreters of *Ossessione* have perceptively suggested that Lo Spagnolo's pseudogenerosity conceals a cruder intent, as he solicits Gino as a quasi prostitute (Bacon 18; Ginsberg 259). Despite Visconti's reticence regarding the nature of Gino and Lo Spagnolo's relationship (no fascist censor would have allowed the sexual explicitness that Visconti would later display, for example, in *La caduta degli dei* or *Ludwig*), the irony of buying sex from the dispossessed and downtrodden while fighting for Marxist ideals was one of the recurring themes of Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* If, however, in the hoboes' world the practice of confining a man's sexual relationships with women to casual and commercial exchanges was the prevailing way to shun the trimmings of domesticity and sentimental bourgeois attachments, homosexual relationships carried different connotations. On the one hand, brief same-sex relationships preserved man's independence from the world of "woman" and its trappings. The romance of the road meant escaping "from the narrowness of woman's influence into the wide free world of men" (DePastino xxvi). Yet, the "manly" habits and behaviors that such romance involved were by no means egalitarian. As DePastino explains:

Far more common than sex between hoboes of equal status were the predatory relationships between veterans of the road, called "jockers" or "wolves," and younger initiates, known as "lambs," "prushuns," or "punks." . . . Within days of hitting the road, a rail-riding teenager could expect to be besieged by wolves promising money, protection, and instruction in the art of "getting by," in exchange for a sexual relationship. . . .

. . . The stakes in these battles between wolf and road kid were "manly" independence and self-possession, not heterosexual identity. Like many laboring subcultures, hobohemia did not categorize its members in terms of "heterosexual" and "homosexual" but rather in terms of phallic domination and submission. (xxvii-xxviii)

During his brief road romance with Lo Spagnolo Gino has to test the limitations of "manly" independence through the emotional claims Lo Spagnolo imposes upon him. The much-cited two-shot of the happy couple sitting and rolling cigarettes on the wall of the San Ciriaco Belvedere in Ancona, sharing intimate dreams of freedom and togetherness, cracks its veracity by exposing its clichéd filmic technique, as the following, melodramatic countershot of

a postcard-perfect Adriatic Sea further underscores (Quaresima, "Ossessione" 44). Rather than providing an alternative contract of brotherly camaraderie, Lo Spagnolo shares Giovanna's jealousy and possessiveness, as shown in the boarding room scene in the Ancona harbor neighborhood. Impersonal, unwelcoming, and barren of all decoration, like a prison cell, the room evokes both the transience and the constraints of Lo Spagnolo's life. Dialogue and mise-en-scène emphasize Gino's entrapment: while his words express his sense of being tied to Giovanna, the setting accentuates the boundaries that mainstream society imposes on Lo Spagnolo's apparently carefree lifestyle.

Giovanna's house of mirrors metamorphoses here into an ominous cave, where the shadows that the two men cast on the empty walls create effects of duplication that repeat those generated by the mirrors in the Braganas' bedroom. The boardinghouse's shadows also suggest another kind of doubling, one that further underscores the notion of duplicity and deceit. Since Plato's allegory of the cave in *The Republic*, shadows have often indicated the opposition between illusion and reality, in a context that emphasizes the idea of forced confinement (Plato 209–34).³⁹ A scene replete with sexual tension and the promise of imminent intimacy eerily contains the intimations of betrayal and fraud that will place Lo Spagnolo right within, and not against, the system that he only superficially contested.

Soon after Gino leaves Ancona to return to Giovanna, Visconti shows Lo Spagnolo entering the glass door of the local police station. As the door closes, we see the silhouetted shadow of the police commissioner, who addresses him as "Tavolato Giuseppe, detto Lo Spagnolo" (Tavolato Giuseppe, a.k.a. The Spaniard) (99). By emphasizing Lo Spagnolo's patronymic and legally sanctioned identification at the expense of the acquired moniker, the commissioner alludes to an inherent duplicity in the character's mixed identity. Though we are not privy to the interrogation, the film's denouement implies that Lo Spagnolo was there to denounce Gino's implication in Bragana's murder to the police.⁴⁰ Tavolato's unctuous obsequiousness only confirms his secretive connivance with a system that he only apparently challenged.⁴¹ As a police informer, Lo Spagnolo betrays the foremost rules in the hobo's code of conduct, the code that, as Jack London explained in numerous vignettes, always united hobo with fellow hobo against John Law, regardless of the extent and nature of the hobo's legal infractions. Prompted by jealousy and a sense of personal vendetta, Lo Spagnolo can neither claim to possess the moral uprightness of he who denounces a murderer and invokes society's jus-

tice nor abide by the honor code of a world that flows underneath the current of mainstream culture and law. A loner and a pariah, Lo Spagnolo shares the codes of duplicity and deceit that marked Cain's novel.

In the gender economy of *Ossessione* the masculine represents a state of crisis, Bragana standing for a debased, ridiculed patriarchy, Gino and Lo Spagnolo for patriarchy's defiant, yet flawed, antitheses. Interpreted in its archetypal foundation, Giovanna, or "the feminine principle," has been seen as the tragic embodiment of the forces of Eros and Thanatos, a Gorgon ensnaring Gino into immobility and bringing destruction and death upon her environment (Mangini 261; Micciché 56). Visconti's adaptation of Cain's last beach episode, the forlorn scene on the Po River delta, adds a historically specific reading to this universalizing mythème.

Here, Visconti repeats the baptismal theme from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, as Gino reunites with Giovanna at sunrise and confides to her: "Tonight was liberating for me. . . . It's as if I became another man. . . . Now I'm sure that I love you, Giovanna."⁴² In spite of Gino's conversional words at the dawn of a new day, the film's mise-en-scène tells a different story. In the barren flatness of marshy sand and empty sky, Giovanna appears small and vulnerable, and, as she borrows Gino's oversized jacket, it is she who is "reborn" in a new, masculine, identity (fig. 2.6). She embraces Gino's standards and lifestyle, just as she had attempted to follow Bragana's values beforehand. If patriarchy is in a state of crisis, and yet still manages to hinder the alternative represented by Gino and Lo Spagnolo, "woman," as socioeconomic construct at the cusp of fascism, is doubly alienated. Systematically robbed of any claim to an identity of her own, Giovanna can only play a role in a tragic masquerade: a pregnant woman in male clothing.

As formal choices become ideological vessels, *Ossessione* reveals its meanings obliquely, as they are cast within the gaps and voids of the filmic continuum and are carried across metaphorical bridges and toward paradigmatic encounters with other narrative systems. In *Ossessione* personal and collective identities emerge from Visconti's careful orchestration of doubling and mirroring strategies that hinder the progressive and liberating construction of the characters' existential journey. The film's formal arrangement reflects a troubled existential paradigm where apparently linear itineraries transform themselves into claustrophobic mazes, stasis wins over forward motion, and appearances often replace reality. Cain's unforgiving America, as drawn in the evocative shorthand of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, was the stark parch-



Figure 2.6. By wearing Gino's jacket, Giovanna attempts to reinvent herself as Gino's mirror image. Courtesy of Ajay Film Company/Photofest.

ment on which Visconti superimposed his own images of contemporary Italy. In its estranging interplay of “repetition without replication” (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* xvi), *Ossessione* works on multiple levels, the echoes of foreign voices and the contours of remote forms enriching the bare lines of its outmost layer. Sharing Vittorini's and Pavese's aesthetic quest, Vittorini viewed American literature as the distorting mirror—the Nietzschean double—through which classical paradigms could be both repeated and estranged: adapted, that is, with new, often polemical, meanings. In *Ossessione* these paradigms reflect the legacy of recent history through images of crisis. At film's end an inverted version of the prime symbolic construct in the Christian tradition, a perverse baptismal dip, brings death by water. Visconti signifies the unmaking rather than the celebration of identity, as Giovanna's puppetlike corpse and Gino's forlorn gaze in the film's final close-up stand to confirm (fig. 2.7).⁴³ Visconti's reversal of the baptismal redemptive trope resolutely withdraws the option of salvation from the two protagonists' moral horizon.



Figure 2.7. After the accident, Gino brings Giovanna's puppetlike body, marked by a deep wound around her neck, to the roadside. Courtesy of ICI/Photofest.

Whether made culpable by the force of fate, by their own free choices, or, as the film seems to imply, by the doomed interaction of their weakened wills with overwhelming exterior events, Visconti's characters are not "pure hearted and innocent victims even in the display of passion, betrayal, and murder, who exist *before* good and evil," as Antonio Pietrangeli saw them.⁴⁴ Both victims and perpetrators of evil, Gino and Giovanna are embedded in the moral breakdown of a specific society, in a precise historical moment. As both victims and perpetrators, Gino and Giovanna are to be pitied but are also to be held responsible for participating in the moral collapse of the world in which they live. It will take the end of the war for writers and filmmakers alike to reappropriate, in Marxist key, the Christ-related metaphors of springtime rebirth, in order to celebrate a new national selfhood and state the optimistic commitment to a better, brighter future. In *Ossessione*, which was perhaps too hurriedly hailed as the first neorealist film, April remains the "cruellest month."

If Visconti's cinematic representation of life under fascist dictatorship remains unforgivingly bleak, *Ossessione's* overarching message is not one of unredeemable circularity and solipsistic pessimism. Visconti's dialogue with American literature defines his adaptive journey in terms that are both transformative and future-bound. This dialogue invites comparison between the corporatist and authoritarian ethos of the fascist regime and the founding tenets of American democracy: self-reliance, individualism, and personal accountability. These values haunt the ideological palace of the fascist regime and challenge its doctrine of collectivism, conformity, and authoritarianism, while simultaneously demanding to be reassessed, following America's hard awakening from its own failed dream of progress and prosperity. Set in the dialogical framework that inspired Gadamer's analysis of the hermeneutical journey, Visconti's adaptation of *Cain* marks the encounter between two tragic portrayals of different human experiences. These experiences, set against the shambles of Italian fascism and the fabrications of American liberal democracy, need not be ranked in relation to each other. Rather, their coming together should inspire interpretations that surpass their own sociopolitical specificities and reach a broader "horizon of understanding"—a horizon that in 1943 the aristocratic and Catholic Visconti thought he was beginning to reach in his dialogue with the Marxist intellectuals of the French Popular Front.

Grotesque Doublings and the Dangers of the Sublime

Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head"

And this quaintness and grotesqueness are, as we have elsewhere endeavored to show, very powerful, and if well managed, very admissible adjuncts to Ideality.

EDGAR ALLAN POE, REVIEW OF *THE BOOK OF GEMS*

Rarely anthologized today, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head: A Tale with a Moral" is regarded as an isolated short story in Poe's oeuvre, sharing space, at best, with a handful of other early narratives that did not fully pass the test of time. In a 1983 collection of Poe's comedies and satires, significantly entitled *The Other Poe*, David Galloway acknowledges that temporal distance "has inevitably blunted the thrust of many of these works; their topical allusions are now archly obscure and the stories fail to rise above them to silhouette more universal foibles" (8). In his letters Poe presented some of these early stories, the number of which varied from eleven to seventeen, as *The Tales of the Folio Club*, a series of burlesques of current literary fashions. In spite of his persistent efforts Poe failed to gather and publish these stories as a coherent whole, and it is unclear whether "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" was at one point included in his expanding list.¹ Though he referred to this rather amorphous group of early works as "grotesques," the two-volume collection that appeared in 1839 as *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* did not include "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." These publishing vicissitudes, together with the fact that Poe never offered a clear designation of what he intended by *grotesque*, caused

the early tales that were not anthologized in later collections to be dismissed as “youthful *dadas*,” in Baudelaire’s patronizing words (Silverman 153).²

In *The Other Poe* Galloway argues against Baudelaire’s evaluation and contends that these tales would yield much information about Poe’s narrative craft if the social and cultural establishment of which they were a part could speak again. Recovering the (hardly agreement-prone) encounters between Poe and the literary scene of his time would do more than serve mere antiquarian curiosity; they would help define the features of Poe’s parodic and burlesque style and enable us to better appreciate the full extent of Poe’s satirical wit within the context of local cultural mores and literary conventions, rather than in light of the Europe-driven construct of the *artiste maudit* that Baudelaire and Rimbaud (and the Italian *Scapigliati*) so successfully and self-servingly disseminated. This chapter follows Galloway’s lead, while arguing that in his estranging counterfable “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” Poe does not exploit the grotesque solely to create a jejune mockery of a “provincial” literary scene (Galloway 8). Poe used the enduring transcultural and transmedial features of the grotesque to unsettle stable conventions of genre and dispute the most revered sites of contemporary cultural authority.³ He demonstrated a deep understanding of the hermeneutical power of this subversive mode, as he audaciously adapted it to function as the unbalancing Nietzschean double—the reverse mirror image—of the American Renaissance’s very moral barometer, the transcendental sublime.

The grotesque, ever since its discovery on the wall decorations of Nero’s palace (the *Domus Aurea*) and in the Bath of Titus in Rome, has been consistently interpreted as “disturbing and unsettling” (Debevec Henning 107). As a “protean idea” assuming a multitude of forms, the grotesque is “a species of confusion” engaging in a sustained attack on the clear-cut classical norms of decorum, order, and mimesis (Harpham xi). The grotesque defies rational and structured thought and challenges the principles of noncontradiction, identity, and difference. In grotesque art forms, polar opposites mirror each other and turn into disquieting hybrids, as nothing appears to be either the same or different from anything else: vegetable forms change into human shapes, and human shapes into mechanical objects; male and female attributes coexist and so do anthropomorphic and animal traits. As barriers crumble, all distinctions become blurred, including those between self and other, reality and dream, conscious and unconscious, and reason and madness.⁴ Thus estranged,



Figure 3.1. Andrea Mantegna, *Self-portrait in a grotesque*.
Fresco. Camera degli sposi, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy.
Scala / Art Resource, New York. Used by permission.

the known world appears to be both familiar and unfamiliar, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, at once.

Undecidability and indeterminacy govern the grotesque's paradoxical "inner logic" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 35), as traditional categories merge and break down. Fearsome and comic elements intermix in situations that imply "ludicrous horror or horrifying ludicrousness" (Guthke 73) (fig. 3.1). Inspired by Wolfgang Kayser's seminal study on the grotesque, more recent scholars have underscored how the grotesque is not a mere polar opposite of the sublime.

The grotesque invades and subverts pure and lofty concepts as well as sharply defined generic models. The “*unresolved clash of incompatibles*”—the coexistence of heterogeneous and irreconcilable elements—is the main defining feature of the grotesque (Thomson 21). Favoring the *in-between*, the grotesque views life as tragicomedy, and engages with the modes of satire, irony, parody, and caricature.⁵ In Geoffrey Harpham’s broad definition, the grotesque is a “transcategorical hybrid,” a copresence of conventionally oppositional systems (xvii), a “Nietzschean double” in the Deleuzean terminology adopted in this book.⁶

Poe and the Tradition of the Moral Fable

With sophisticated narrative self-consciousness, in “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” Poe utilizes the grotesque mode to sabotage the very genre that hosts it, that of the moral fable. “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” tells the bizarre adventures of the first-person narrator’s fraternal friend, Toby Dammit. Having developed “a propensity for cursing and swearing, and for backing his assertions by bets” from a very young age (117), Toby stubbornly refuses to listen to his friend’s well-meaning advice and reform his loose morals. After fatefully gambling his head away to the devil, Toby is involved in a gruesome accident in which he is beheaded. As may be expected, the devil immediately materializes and claims his head. Toby becomes an *exemplum*, albeit *ex negativo*, for “all riotous livers” (124)—the tale of his sad life and even sadder demise a lesson about the need to uphold strict rules of conduct. While this synopsis shows how “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” adheres to the conventional thematic structure of the moral fable, this is only the most superficial and, as we will see, deceptive reading of Poe’s multilayered tale. Poe includes several significant twists that cast the entire genre into a grotesque mold, achieving an overall satirical effect. “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” is what Bakhtin would define as a double-voiced text, one in which the moral tale is retold with another accent, and refracted within it is “one’s own fresh intention” (*The Dialogic* 328). This intention displaces, redirects, and *adapts* the original object (the moral tale) into a new and, in our case, polemically ironic frame of reference. Unlike in other, founding texts of sublimity and grotesqueness such as Dante’s *Commedia*, the transcendence of heaven and the chthonian monstrosity of hell are not separate domains for Toby, the pilgrim,

and its guide, the narrator. They coexist in a space that hybridizes the sublime right from within the realm of the moral fable, turning it upside down.

Though variations abound, the simplest structure of a moral fable consists of a short narrative tagged by a "copulative line introducing an epimythic moral, often expressed by a proverb or proverbial saying" (Carnes 312). Readers are thus presented with an emblematic situation, the consequences of which inspire the narrator's moralizing conclusion—the proverbial *fabula docet*.⁷ If, as is very often the case, this moralizing clause presents itself in metaphorical form (for example, "living high brings men low," to cite a characteristic saying in Poe's time), the reader is left to test his or her wit and to extract the correct meaning(s) from the rhetorical trope.⁸ Poe's encounter with the moral fable is manipulative from the start, as he emphasizes the didactic overtones of the fabulistic genre by reversing its conventional epimythic structure into a promythic axiom: in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head: A Tale with a Moral" it is the title itself that assails the readers with its absolute and apodictic moral directive. Poe's sententious titular statement thus infuses his narrative with the authority and memorable wisdom that proverbs traditionally communicate.

Fables and proverbs have enjoyed a long literary partnership, proverbs conveying "wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views" in a fixed and aphoristic form, and fables depicting these very morals in a more detailed and expansive manner (Mieder, "Popular Views" 119). What makes Poe's tale different is that, rather than being inferred from the events of the plot through acts of logical deduction and analogical decoding, the moral exists here a priori. The fable is constructed ad hoc to justify the title's warning and thus bring the idiom "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" to its inevitable and preordained conclusion. As the narrator declares:

There is no just ground . . . for the charge brought against me . . . that I have never written a moral tale, or, in more precise words, a tale with a moral. . . . By way of mitigating the accusations against me, I offer the sad history appended; a history about whose obvious moral there can be no question whatever, since he who runs may read it in the large capitals which form the title of the tale. I should have credit for this arrangement: a far wiser one than that of La Fontaine and others, who reserve the impression to be conveyed until the last moment, and thus sneak it in at the fag end of their fables. (116)

Here the reference to the accusation that Poe's pulpit-trained detractors often leveled against him of having never written a moral tale makes the first-person narrator mirror Poe the historical author. The performative emphasis and absolutizing tone of the fable's titular expression thus highlight Poe's authoritative moral posturing, as he displays himself as the bearer of a universal truth, via his story's "obvious moral." Examining this posturing in its proper ironic context will be my task in the following pages. Suffice it to say, for now, that the collective and time-honored cultural warranty that the story's "obvious moral" appears to hold in its imperative and aphoristic finality is both questioned and belittled as soon as it is stated. Poe's ironic argument that even a hurried and shortsighted reader will not have trouble detecting his moral (because it is printed in large capitals in the title) suggests that Poe's readers need sharper exegetical skills to decode this counterfable.

In Poe's time proverbs and fables formed a rhetorical arsenal widely used by preachers, politicians, schoolmasters, philosophers, novelists, and lawyers to impart knowledge and uphold morals. If Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* infused the early literature of the colonies with gnomic and aphoristic proclamations of Puritan ethics, and if the Bible continued to provide inspiration with its pithy and sententious maxims, in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America the lofty tradition of biblical quotation had several popular counterparts. Almanacs, for example, were tools of practical information and moral education that often used proverbs and proverbial fables to communicate their witty and pragmatic worldviews.⁹ Contemporary magazines, such as the *Dial*, published transcripts of "Negro proverbs," "Indian sayings," and "exotic" maxims taken from the classics and the Confucian books. During the American Renaissance—to use F. O. Matthiessen's felicitous definition of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the collection of proverbs became a huge cultural phenomenon in a manner similar to Renaissance Europe, which had seen the massive publication of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Adagia*. Within these learned and popular traditions the great masters of transcendental philosophy and pragmatics, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, developed their own metaphorical and aphoristic writing, and it is in light of this extensive use of metaphorical proverbs within an edifying, devotional, and didactic framework that Poe wrote his counterfable.

Distorting Mirrors: A Plural First-Person Singular

That Poe had no intention of offering an apologia for the moral fable but, rather, a grotesque subversion of this genre becomes evident once we recognize the performative complexities of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." These complexities involve the overt or covert agents of the fable's verbal performances: the narrator, the author, the implied author, and the characters. Though the use of the first-person pronoun could justify combining the first three agents in one and the same persona (the "I" who narrates the story), this does not consistently happen in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." These agents reflect, repeat, and transform one another in a complex interplay of superimpositions, doublings, and reciprocal distortions. To borrow J. L. Austin's terminology, we can argue that the *intentions* behind these agents' speech acts are often at variance (9–11). Thus, the *same* utterances do not imply mere repetition of equivalent structures of meaning. In their multiple encounters they carry different connotations, acquire different meanings, and demand different responses; they therefore need close examination.

Mimicking the proverb-rich style of a puritan preacher, Poe's narrator stalks the moral high ground at the beginning of his narrative. He chastises the southern European writers who condone the writing of immoral works by establishing a sharp divide between their lives (which must be chaste, thrifty, and industrious) and their works (which may depict just the opposite traits):

"Con tal que las costumbres de un autor," says Don Tomas De Las Torres, in the preface to his *Amatory Poems* "sean puras y castas, importa muy poco que no sean igualmente severas sus obras"—meaning, in plain English, that, provided the morals of an author are pure, personally, it signifies nothing what are the morals of his books. We presume that Don Tomas is now in Purgatory for the assertion. It would be a clever thing, too, in the way of poetical justice, to keep him there until his *Amatory Poems* get out of print, or are laid definitely upon the shelf through lack of readers. (115)

In spite of his stern assurance of Yankee forthrightness, the narrator's English is hardly "plain" in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." By referring to specific incidents of Poe's own life and cultural times (for example, the accusation of having never written a moral tale), the moralistic first-person narrator both *repeats* and *subverts* the image of the historical Poe. The historical Poe

(a notorious debtor and gambler) would become the author of "The Poetic Principle," where he theorized the strict separation of ethics and aesthetics.¹⁰ Here, however, the narrator claims that an author's personal ethics and those of his books are so interconnected as to shape not only his life but his afterlife as well! The narrative "I," then, simultaneously *is* and *is not* a persona for Poe himself, and this double (Nietzschean) identity—self-reflexive and distorting at once—is responsible for the fable's complex antiphrastic and ironic language. Since this very language is the vehicle that conveys the fable's moral lesson, it is reasonable to hypothesize that this moral lesson may be far less "obvious" than Poe/the narrator appeared to have initially suggested.

Similarly, the narrator's declaration that "every fiction should have a moral" (115) reveals its full ironic potential upon undergoing a humorous process of self-relativization. With erudite fastidiousness the narrator lists a series of increasingly outlandish morals extracted from the *Batrachomyomachia* to prove that every literary work has profound lessons to convey: "Philip Melanchton, some time ago, wrote a commentary upon the *Batrachomyomachia* and proved that the poet's object was to excite a distaste for sedition. Pierre La Seine, going a step farther, shows that the intention was to recommend to young men temperance in eating and drinking. Just so, too, Jacobus Hugo has satisfied himself that, by Evenus, Homer meant to insinuate John Calvin; by Antinous, Martin Luther; by the Lotophagi, Protestants in general; and by the Harpies, the Dutch" (115). The conclusion that, in fact, there are as many morals as there are critics wishing to dig for them and that, as a consequence, the novelist should not concern himself too much about his works' ethical norms reveals Poe's sarcastic pitch within the narrator's solemn drone: "A novelist . . . need have no care of his moral. It is there—that is to say, it is somewhere—and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves. When the proper time arrives, all that the gentleman intended, and all that he did not intend, will be brought to light, in the *Dial* or the *Down-Easter*, together with all that he ought to have intended, and the rest that he clearly meant to intend;—so that it will all come very straight in the end" (115–16). The choice of the *Batrachomyomachia* itself is meaningful, as the humor resulting from readings (such as the narrator's) that are blind to the fact that the comic fable attributed to Homer is a parody of the *Iliad* constitutes a tongue-in-cheek reference to the first-person narrator's earnest standing vis-à-vis Poe's parodic fable. Adapting Bakhtin's koiné, we can argue that in "Never Bet the Devil

Your Head" the narratorial discourse is eminently *multivoiced*. Closely intertwined, alike and yet conflicting, these voices ironically build and undermine their own discursive practices—the moral fable being simultaneously told and untold by a complex and double/duplicitous narrative "I."

A further level of complexity may be added to our analysis if we consider the function of the story's implied author. In accordance with classic narratological taxonomies such as those provided by Wayne Booth, Gérard Genette, and Seymour Chatman we can define the implied author as a "second self" detached from the flesh-and-blood being who wrote the text. The implied author is responsible for the text's general "norms and values" (Chatman, *Story* 149). From this perspective it would appear reasonable to suggest that by titling his short story "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" and by alluding to the generic principles of the moral fable, Poe invites his readers to define the implied author's "norms and values" as consistent with the conventions of the genre to which his story belongs.

These conventions dictate that readers identify the fable's proper metaphorical context, unveil the moral injunction concealed beneath the fable's figural garb, and thus infer the implied author's "norms and values."¹¹ In a moral fable readers and author are supposed to share the rhetorical competence and cultural wisdom that allows them to interpret the moralizing proverbial saying in a consistent, if not univocal, manner. For example, an American reader faced with a moral fable regarding a happy-go-lucky farm boy who experiences pain and loss after being robbed of the basket containing all of his eggs would substitute "belongings" for "eggs" and abstract from this everyday experience a general norm regarding the "foolishness of chancing everything on a single venture" rather than "spreading one's risks" more wisely (Simpson 64).

Arguably, in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" the tale of Toby Dammit's outlandish beheading offers us the cautionary advice to use our head (reason) wisely and avoid being so foolish as to attempt to compete in vice (gambling, idleness, poverty, and sloth), with far more infamous and powerful antagonists. Only inexperienced and naive readers would fail to perform this decoding task, as the moral fable's continued success rests on its audience's ability to identify the implied author's moral intentions and thus profit from a lesson of homely wisdom. This could be identified as the tale's ruling "ethos," which I interpret, following Hutcheon's definition, as the "intended response

achieved by a literary text. The intention is inferred by the decoder from the text itself" (*A Theory of Parody* 55). The ethos of any text, then, is the overlap between the encoded effect as intended by the implied author and the decoded effect as achieved by the reader.

In spite of the fact that it is a first-person narrative, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" displays a sharp divide between the implied author's alleged ethos and the narrator's moral and rhetorical proficiency. In fact, the narrator consistently fails to perform (or even suggest that readers perform) the translation from literal to metaphorical codes that is necessary to interpret any moral fable. Arguably, this rhetorical skill should confirm what is already displayed in the title and opening paragraphs of the story: the narrator's didactic assertiveness, moral authority, and formulaic wisdom. But, while our narrator peppers his utterances with axioms, idioms, and proverbs, and exhibits his erudition with pithy citations in Latin, French, and even Arabic, his readings of Toby's life story are strictly literal and lack all metaphorical and universalizing breadth:

Defuncti injuria ne officiantur was a law of the twelve tables, and *De Morituri nil risi* *bunum* is an excellent injunction—even if the dead in question are nothing but dead small beer. It is not my design, therefore, to vituperate my deceased friend, Toby Dammit; . . . he himself was not to blame for his vices. They grew out of a personal defect in his mother. She did her best in the way of flogging him while an infant; for duties to her well-regulated mind were always pleasures, and babies, like tough steaks, or the modern Greek olive-trees, are invariably the better for beating—but poor woman! She had the misfortune to be left-handed, and a child flogged left-handedly had better to be left unflogged. The world revolves from right to left. It will not do to whip a baby from left to right. If each blow in the proper direction drives an evil propensity out, it follows that every thump in the opposite one knocks its quota of wickedness in. (116)

In his deadpan seriousness the apparently erudite narrator thus also plays the role known to folklorists as that of the "Literal Fool," usually a country bumpkin or a foreigner who ends up being ridiculed because of his unawareness of the figural dimension of speech.¹²

The absurd and grotesque humor of Poe's story results precisely from the narrator's strictly literal depiction of conventionally figural situations. He recounts, for example, how, one day during a stroll, he and Toby arrive at a covered bridge, which they decide to cross:

At length, having passed nearly across the bridge, we approached the termination of the footway, when our progress was impeded by a turnstile of some height. Through this I made my way quietly, pushing it around as usual. But this would not serve the turn of Mr Dammit. He insisted on leaping the stile, and said he could cut a pigeon-wing over it in the air. Now this, conscientiously speaking, I did not think he could do. . . . I therefore told him, in so many words, that he was a braggadocio and could not do what he said. For this I had reason to be sorry afterwards; for he straightaway offered to bet the Devil his head that he could. . . .

. . . I saw him run nimbly and spring grandly from the floor of the bridge, cutting the most awful flourishes with his legs as he went up. I saw him high in the air, pigeon-winged it to admiration just over the top of the stile; and of course, I thought it an unusually singular thing that he did not continue to go over. But the whole leap was the affair of a moment, and, before I had a chance to make any profound reflections, down came Mr. Dammit on the flat of his back, on the same side of the stile from which he had started. (121–23)

As the narrator explains with a coy euphemism, Toby has received "what may be termed a serious injury" (123). A flat iron bar stretching horizontally from side to side of the bridge to strengthen its structure has "come precisely in contact" with Toby's neck, thus "depriv[ing] him of his head" (124). At this point a "little lame old gentleman" (121) who has been lurking in the shadows runs forward, grabs Toby's head, and runs away with it. The grotesque narrative that follows records a biological impossibility, Toby's (albeit brief) survival from the "terrible loss" of his head (124).

Rhetorically, Poe is doing what the great masters of the pictorial grotesque were doing visually: he is displaying metaphors in a deliberately literal way. In *Netherlandish Proverbs*, to cite what has been defined as the *summum bonum* of the genre (Mieder, "One Picture" 198), Pieter Bruegel painted a world upside down, where humans plainly enact a series of folk metaphors. To focus on a recurring character, the devil, we see, for example, an enthroned beastlike being listening to a kneeling man's confession ("To go confess to the Devil"), while another man holds up a candle to him ("To burn a candle to the Devil") (fig. 3.2). Although on a literal level the painting offers a representation of human foibles and superstitions, it also satirizes and warns against such foolish behavior, thus activating the implicit metaphorical message and reinforcing the artist's moral teaching. Viewers who focus on the confession scene, for example, are warned against the imprudence of disclosing secrets to their



Figure 3.2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525–1569), *The Netherlandish Proverbs*. 1559. Oil on oak panel, 117 cm × 163 cm. Inv 1720. Photo by Joerg P. Anders. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York. Used by permission.

enemies, and those who look at the man holding a candle to the devil are stirred to loathe hypocrites and flatterers.

The fact that, notwithstanding his display of rhetorical flair, Poe's narrator fails to offer a metaphorical key to lift Toby's situation from the literal to the figural realm is not, in and of itself, enough to make Poe's story a counterfable. Just like with Bruegel's pictorial counterpart, readers versed in the fabulistic conventions are often expected to take the metaphorical leap on their own, in accordance with the tale's implied moral intentions—the tale's ethos. "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" is a counterfable precisely because of these intentions, which turn out to be quite different from the didactic goals that we would normally attribute to the implied author of a classic moral fable:

In the end, [Toby] abandoned all other forms of wager, and gave himself up to 'I'll bet the Devil my head' with a pertinacity and exclusiveness of devotion that

displeased not less than surprised me. *I am always displeased by circumstances for which I cannot account. Mysteries force a man to think, and so injure his health.* The truth is, there was something in the air with which Mr Dammit was wont to give utterance to his offensive expression—something in his manner of enunciation, which at first interested, and afterwards made me very uneasy—something which, for want of a more definite term at present, I must be permitted to call queer; *but which Mr Coleridge would have called mystical, Mr Kant pantheistical, Mr Carlyle twistical, and Mr Emerson hyperquizzitistical.* (118, emphasis added)

This passage reveals a transition from a first-person narrator who ironically constructs himself as the antithesis of Poe the author of the "Tales of Mystery" and the "Tales of Ratiocination" to one whose satirical aims are one and the same with those of the historical Poe. The crescendo from the conversational "queer" to the ingeniously hyperbolic "hyperquizzitistical" demonstrates, in fact, that Poe clearly intended for his contemporary Emerson to bear his heaviest satirical punch.

At the very moment in which the narrative "I" and Poe's historical persona are constructed to mirror each other, the role of the moral fable's implied author is significantly altered. Rather than adhering to the conventional moral-fable ethos, which dictates imparting a lesson of universal ethical value (Poe's tongue-in-cheek "obvious moral"), the ethos of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" results from Poe's culture-specific ideological satire. Besides the humorously exaggerated mimicry of Emerson's oracular perorations, epigrammatic style, and dogmatic assertiveness, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" provides a clever parody of Emerson's idealistic faith, as well as of New England transcendentalism in general.¹³ Moreover, by offering a humorous travesty of the often-pompous style of contemporary literary magazines, the *Dial* and the *North American Review* in particular, Poe extended his satire to include the literary market in which he often felt himself to be a misunderstood outsider, a market upon which he depended for his professional survival.¹⁴

"The Word One with the Thing," According to Poe

Critics such as Ralph C. LaRosa and J. Russell Reaver paid particular attention to Emerson's use of proverbs and demonstrated how his rhetorical method "emerged from his early 'search for form,' [which] entailed a practice, dating from his school essays, of composing from commonplace books of collected

sententiae" and from his own "proverb-book," probably a personal compilation of aphorisms and folk sayings (LaRosa 14).¹⁵ According to Emerson: "Proverbs . . . are always the literature of Reason, or the statements of an absolute truth without qualification. Proverbs, like the sacred books of each nation, are the sanctuary of the Intuitions. That which the droning world, chained to appearances, will not allow the realist to say in his own words, it will suffer him to say in proverbs without contradiction. And this law of laws . . . is hourly preached in all markets and workshops *in flights of proverbs*, whose teaching is as true and as omnipresent as that of birds and flies" ("Compensation" 63–64; emphasis added). Fascinated by the metaphorical power of proverbs, Emerson commented on how these "memorable words of history" selected facts of nature "as a picture or parable of a moral truth," thus revealing the secret correspondences between the "properties of matter" and the "properties of the soul" ("Nature" 33). Significantly, in his lecture on "Ethics" Emerson claimed that any investigation of moral philosophy should start with the study of the proverbs common to all people ("Ethics" 144, 152–53).

Emerson claimed that proverbs reflect the truths of the all-pervading divinity that symbolizes itself in the many forms of the phenomenal world and give rhetorical expression to the universal harmony between micro- and macrocosm ("Doctrine of the Hands" 232–33). However homely their imagery, according to Emerson proverbs express the "concentrated insight into the divine 'core' of human imagination and character" (Moldenhauer 154). In their metaphorical garb proverbs constitute a natural language that offers a springboard to soar to the loftiest truths of nature and the highest moral and spiritual concepts. When Emerson argued that "Man is an analogist [who] studies relations in all objects" ("Nature" 27), he also implied, with typical optimism, that the result of "Man's" analogical efforts was the discovery of nature's organic unity and the "choral harmony of the whole" ("On the Relation of Man" 49).

"What is true of proverbs is true of all fables, parables, and allegories," wrote Emerson, because although in their primary sense they are trivial facts, they all always imply more than they state, and thus rely on the clever response based on the audience's intuition of their analogical meaning ("Nature" 33).¹⁶ Emerson's famous and much-parodied aphorism "hitch your wagon to a star" conveys the oracular and buoyant philosophy of transcendentalism, a philosophy that, in spite of its roots in the everyday, had far higher ambitions than the merely empirical. As Ralph LaRosa points out, by 1830 Emerson

had reached the conclusion that "proverbial sentences are the fundamental language of all experience and hence the embodiments of natural design" (LaRosa 17). In sum, proverbs express "the transcendentalism of common life" ("Circles" 187).

Besides recalling Bacon's fascination with maxims and their terse compression of thought (his *sententiae*), Emerson's view of proverbs was inspired by Coleridge's notion of the aphorism as the rhetorical form that best expresses the unity of the *word* with the *thing*, and the fusion of mental and physical realms: "Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. *Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*. *Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression*, the crossing of a *line*. . . . We say the *heart* to express emotion, the *head* to denote thought; and *thought* and *emotion* are words borrowed from sensible things, and now appropriated to spiritual nature. Most of the process by which this transformation is made, is hidden from us in the remote time when language was framed" ("Nature" 25–26). According to Emerson, by re-fastening worn-out expressions to vital facts, proverbs create verbal "bridges" and "roads" that connect and unify the landscapes of experience (*Journals* 4, 363; LaRosa 30). Emerson was well acquainted with Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, with its plan to direct readers' attention to the "Science of Words," and "the incalculable advantages attached to the habit of using them appropriately, and with a distinct knowledge of their primary, derivative, and metaphorical senses" (Coleridge lviii). It is precisely this "Science of Words" that Poe ridicules in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." Affected with "the Transcendentals," Toby becomes a burlesque of the New England orator as Emerson envisioned him: a man "all glittering and fiery with imagination" ("Eloquence" 762) and prone to those sublime fits of eloquence that "in conscious beings we call *ecstasy*" ("The Method of Nature" 204). Emerson thought that by allowing for the maximum "influx of the Divine mind" ("The Over-Soul" 166) into his own, the transcendental orator used his rhetorical skills to become a facet of the Over-Soul.

Marked by the clever pun between "stile" and "style," Toby's "foolish jump" is a burlesque allegory of Emerson's metaphysical exaltations. A humorous rendition of the failure of the transcendentalists' philosophy of language and of transcendental idealism in general, Toby's failed leap mocks Emerson's conviction that the Idealist is he who reaches the "*other end*" of the material world ("The Transcendentalist" 330). Toby's "odd little and big words" do not

help him approach the Over-Soul and appreciate the connections between the material and the spiritual. Rather than a sublimely organic universe based on the principles of *discordia concors*, Poe evokes a hybrid and unbalanced space where *gravitas* and foolishness coexist and where outlandish words join forces with falsely uplifting facts to burst the transcendentalists' philosophical bubble:

[Toby] seemed to be in an unusual good humor. He was excessively lively—so much so that I entertained I know not what of uneasy suspicion. It is not impossible that he was affected with the *transcendentals*. I am not well enough versed, however, in the diagnosis of the disease to speak with decision upon the point; and unhappily there were none of my friends of the *Dial* present. I suggest the idea, nevertheless, because of a certain species of *austere Merry-Andrewism* which seemed to beset my poor friend, and caused him to make quite a *Tom Fool of himself*. Nothing would serve him but wriggling, and skipping about, under and over everything that came in his way; now shouting out, and now lisping out, all manner of *odd little and big words*, yet *preserving the gravest face in the world all the time*. (120; emphasis added)

Poe introduces a further satirical twist when he considers the consequences of Toby's lost bet to the devil. If the devil grants Coleridge's wish of destroying "the old antithesis of Words and Things, elevating, as it were Words into Things," this happens in a mockingly countertranscendental framework (Matthiessen 30). Not "mere formula[s]" ("Never Bet" 117), Toby's "expletive expressions [and] figures of speech" (118) *literally* turn into actions and claim his head. By depriving him of all intellectual capacities, Toby's words reduce him to subhuman status and ultimately lower him even below that status: "After a close search I could not find [Toby's head] anywhere; so I determined to take him home. . . . In the end he grew worse, and at length died, a lesson to all riotous livers. I bedewed his grave with my tears, worked a bar sinister on his family escutcheon, and, for the general expenses of his funeral, sent in my very moderate bill to the transcendentalists. The scoundrels refused to pay it, so I had Mr Dammit dug up at once, and sold him for dog's meat" (124). Poe's allegory rewrites Thoreau's belief that "the poet writes the history of his body" in a grotesque vein (*Journal* 111). The unity of Words and Things occurs in a debased and utterly material framework rather than in a transcendently sublime one. Humorously, if Henry James Sr. had described Emerson's "spirit and moral taste" as defined by his "ripe unconsciousness of evil" (10), Poe has the

devil wear a New England preacher's garb: "My glance at length fell . . . upon the figure of a little lame old gentleman of venerable aspect. Nothing could be more reverend than his whole appearance; for he not only had a full suit of black, but his shirt was perfectly clean and the collar turned very neatly down over a white cravat, while his hair was parted in form like a girl's. His hands were clasped pensively together over his stomach, and his two eyes were carefully rolled up into the top of his head" (121).

The act of accurately perceiving Poe's sardonic reversal of the transcendentalist's rhetorical flights presupposes the very figural exercise and reasoning process that it condemns. To put it differently, though "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" provides a moral of sorts at the expense of transcendental thought, the moralizing occurs in a narrative context that *both* repeats *and* mocks, by satirically subverting them, all the rhetorical figures and intellectual presuppositions on which such moralizing depends. It is precisely Poe's revisionist and parodic involvement with conventional tropes and their expected interpretations (their "analogical import") that gives his counterfable its creative power.

The very axiom that entitles Poe's fable was not a familiar proverbial phrase, nor was it included in any contemporary proverb manuals or collections of popular sayings. Poe is likely to have tailored and combined existing phrases, the most common perhaps being that of "selling one's soul to the devil." The concrete materiality of Toby's "head" as opposed to the more ethereal "soul" contributes to creating the story's grotesque and earthbound humor. While sharing this humor, readers are invited to participate in Poe's revisionist ingenuity by casting off the conventionally moralistic meaning that the titular proverb initially suggested and to creatively revise this meaning in accordance with Poe's parody of the transcendentalists' belief that "good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories" of the relations between mind and matter (Emerson, "Nature" 31).

On a more general level Poe's story offers a grotesque rendition of Emerson's mode of critical thinking. As numerous scholars have pointed out, Emerson's typical arguments proceeded "not from induction, or logical persuasion of any kind. . . . In spite of his profession of being a seeker, all his mature work proceeded from *a priori* deductive assertions," in which conclusions followed necessarily from the stated premises, and inferences were often built by reasoning from the general to the specific (Matthiessen 65). This is precisely the hermeneutical strategy that Poe mimics when he reverses the typical struc-

ture of the moral fable and places his moral injunction in the story's title. The a priori assertion ("you should never bet the devil your head") controls the narrative progress to the point that the intradiegetic first-person narrator engages in intrusive and repeated predictive statements regarding his best friend's impending fate: "uplifting my voice, [I] made prophecy of his ruin"; "the ruin which I had predicted overtook him at last" (117). But these prophecies are carried out precisely because the narrator/author is *making up* the story from the start, in order to force his a priori assertion to reach its logical and (self-consciously) predetermined conclusion. Once again, the plural and shifting subject positions from which "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" is written *and* acted out allow Poe to both exploit and mock the formal structure and hermeneutical systems that marked the intellectual age that he so uncomfortably inhabited.

The Subject as Self and Other: Toby and His Doppelgänger

Granting that figurative writing (including allegory, symbol, analogy, and metaphor) is one of Poe's parodic targets, we should not overlook the fact that parody and figurative discourse in general share an important trait. They both require that the reader "construct a second meaning through inferences about the surface statements and supplement the foreground with acknowledgement and knowledge of a background context" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 34). If Poe's fable creatively employs (and expects its audience to recognize) the generic form and the tropological devices that simultaneously are its parodic targets, this relationship is not one of mere parasitic exploitation. Poe creates a hybrid and paradoxical structure the elements of which exist in a situation of transgressive, distorting, and grotesque dependence.

In artwork of the grotesque, ambivalent and contradictory forms "are shown to be intertwined in a network of agonistic relationships." Instead of "boundaries and barriers" the grotesque favors "overlays and imbrications" (Debevec Henning 107). Kayser famously defined the grotesque as "the dark and sinister background of a brighter and rationally organized world" (21). Poe's hybrid and shifting narrative challenges such neatly designed polar opposites. In "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" the grotesque is not a mere contrastive device, a pole of tension whose absolute opposite is the sublime. Poe's *monde renversé* does not leave the sublime intact. With the parable of a phi-

losopher's failed leap of faith, the parodied transcendental sublime turns right into its earthbound grotesque alter ego. The grotesque thus functions as the sublime's Nietzschean double, a haunting Other revealing an obscure and subversive similarity with the Same that it both repeats and reverses.

The odd relationship between the first-person narrator and the protagonist of Poe's story constitutes an appropriately sinister rendition of Poe's grotesque. At the beginning the two are morally and physically separate, the narrator being a frustrated mentor and older friend chastising and attempting to reform Toby Dammit's jejune and irresponsible behavior. Irony, however, soon intervenes to unbalance the narrator's moral rectitude, as revealed by the increasingly outlandish "truths" upon whose authority he attempts to reform Toby: "The habit [of laying wagers] was an immoral one, and so I told him. It was a vulgar one; this I begged him to believe. It was discountenanced by society; here I said nothing but the truth. It was forbidden by act of Congress; here I had not the slightest intention of telling a lie. I remonstrated—but to no purpose. I demonstrated—in vain. I entreated—he smiled. I implored—he laughed. I preached—he sneered. I threatened—he swore" (117). As the story develops, the barriers between the narrator and Toby become more fluid, and the polar oppositions between good and evil, reason and madness, and young and old progressively blur:

When I had made an end of my lecture, Mr Dammit indulged himself in some equivocal behavior. . . . I can call to mind only the heads of his discourse. He would be obliged if I would hold my tongue. He wished none of my advice. He despised all my insinuations. He was old enough to take care of himself. Did I still think him baby Dammit? Did I mean to say anything against his character? . . . Was I a fool? Was my maternal parent aware, in a word, of my absence from the domiciliary residence? He would put the latter question to me as a man of veracity, and he would bind himself to abide by my reply. Once more he would demand explicitly if my mother knew that I was out. The fact is, my mamma was very well aware of my merely temporal absence from home. (119)

In a typical doppelgänger scenario reminiscent of "William Wilson," the notion of the subject as a coherent source of signification collapses, the self becomes a mirror image of the other, and readers are left to wonder whether the narrator we are asked to trust is a moral guide or a partner in crime, a child or an adult, a sane person or a madman, and by obvious consequence, whether Toby is at all what we are told he is.

In "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" the boundaries between narrator, author and implied author, and narrator and protagonist continue to shift and change, separate and merge. The conventionally safe space of authorial agency and intention is thus forced to partake in the counterfable's grotesque inconsistencies and in its parodic reversals. If the implied author is a construct prompted by the text itself and is responsible for the "norms" and "values" that seem to be expressed in the work (the text's "encoded intent"), then this ethos is paradoxically mixed, embedded as it is in a series of mutually dependent yet contradictory discursive strategies. While Poe's transgressive counterfable brings to the fore what often remains concealed, "the act and responsibility of enunciation" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 85; Reiss 42), it also reveals that this position of discursive authority cannot be seen as the objective, transparent, and singular source of unitary meaning.

Poe's intertwined and shifting "subject positions" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 119) champion a surprisingly modern epistemology of the grotesque. Like the reflecting surfaces in a kaleidoscope, these subject positions diffuse and multiply the Authorial Word, which loses originality, singularity, and monological "seriousness." In the "double-accented, double-styled" hybridism of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" Poe turns the dominating discourse of Authority into a grotesque object that he exploits and manipulates to refract his parodic intentions.¹⁷ In this sense "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" is an eminently adaptive work. Through their estranging encounters with their grotesque mirror images, Poe disrupted the normative languages of his age (those of moral sermons, biblical texts, and idealistic philosophy) and redirected them from the authoritarian domain of the pulpit to the pluralistic, yet conflictual, space of a marketplace that belatedly recognized him as one of its most subversively creative, and tragic, voices.

Fellini's "Unoriginal" Scripts

The Creative Power of the Grotesque

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your center, in an arch
from the great bridgebuilding of God:
why catching then becomes a power—
not yours, a world's.

RAINER MARIA RILKE, "CATCH ONLY WHAT
YOU'VE THROWN YOURSELF"

What is a translation? On a platter
A poet's pale and glaring head,
A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,
And profanation of the dead.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV,
"ON TRANSLATING EUGENE ONEGIN"

Most Fellini scholars consider it a truism that the magnificent forty-minute episode *Toby Dammit* bears only a superficial resemblance to Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."¹ In an essay discussing the genesis of *Toby Dammit*, Fellini's assistant, Liliana Betti, confirmed this idea to the point of denying that the film was rooted in its literary counterpart. She reported that *il maestro* had instructed her to summarize all of Poe's short stories in order to help him identify a suitable text on which to base his contribution to the French-Italian production entitled *Histoires extraordinaires*,² which also included Roger Vadim's "Metzengerstein" and Louis Malle's "William Wilson."³ Even though Betti conceded that Fellini had been an avid reader of Poe in his youth, she confirmed Fellini's claim that he had read "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" for

the first time only after having completed shooting *Toby Dammit*.⁴ Determining whether Betti's account is apocryphal would be useful to challenge the enduring romantic myth of the artist's "genius" as expression of his absolute imaginative autonomy. My primary intent, however, is not to prove that Fellini studied Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" and borrowed specific images that cannot be ascribed to Betti's summaries. Whether Fellini's acquaintance with Poe's "original" short story was direct or secondhand becomes unimportant in a theory of adaptation that reconfigures the one-on-one dependency of the "derivative" film from the literary "original" in light of a broader circulation of meaning—an interplay of thematic reverberations and echoing of narrative forms occurring both within and across narratives and media. My interest here is to examine how Fellini dealt with the deep levels of Poe's narrative craft in the creative game of repetition and refunctioning that marks the adaptive practices studied in this book. Specifically, Fellini engaged with the representational mode that recurs throughout much of Poe's work. This mode—the grotesque—would have been evident to Fellini from a careful first-hand reading of individual tales such as "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," as well as from a more extensive appraisal of Poe's oeuvre.

Fellini's adaptation of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" to a culture and medium-specific context is a rebuttal to the claim that "as a medium that most successfully accommodates realism, film is . . . unsuited to the portrayal of grotesque or symbolic characters" (G. Miller xiii).⁵ For Fellini, as for Poe, the grotesque is the ideal medium for expressing his contentious relationship with the cultural tradition and the production system on which he depends and from which he wishes to wrestle free. While the satirical weapons that Poe and Fellini, respectively, level against nineteenth-century literary magazines and the twentieth-century film industry are equally sophisticated, the Italian director reveals a deeper sense of urgency regarding the very possibility of the artist's survival in an increasingly profit-driven industry. If, besides lampooning contemporary journals, Poe limited himself to subverting the form of the moral fable in order to mock the dogmatic optimism of a specific school of thought, Fellini's parody engages multiple sites of cultural authority and aesthetic influence, such as the Catholic Church, the film industry, the canons of high art, and the insidious conventions of popular culture. *Toby Dammit* showcases an impressive display of estranging and grotesque techniques that both evoke and attempt to exorcize the specters of commoditization and inauthenticity that, in 1968, Fellini feared were haunting his uncanny and

controversial sets.⁶ As suspiciously "free" as the opening credits may claim his adaptation is, Fellini owes to his American predecessor the recognition that it is within the narrow margins of the distorted repetitions and Nietzschean doublings afforded by the grotesque that the modern artist can find a measure of creative independence and of individual self-realization.

Rather than a humorous travesty of an idealistic philosopher, Fellini's Toby Dammit (played by Terence Stamp) is a self-doubting British Shakespearean actor who has fallen on hard times as a result of drug and alcohol addiction, and whom the Vatican invites to Rome to play the lead role in a movie titled *Trenta dollari* ("Thirty Dollars"). As the Vatican's representative, Father Spagna, explains, this film will depict the Second Coming of Christ:

The first Catholic western, do you understand? Christ's second coming to a desolate frontier land, which is, after all, the living reality of every man's desires: that Christ returns and reveals himself again—He, that is the Peace of our Soul,—as a concrete and tangible presence. . . . Surely, it may sound like a desperate idea . . . that a certain cinema of structure, so to speak, would be able to translate this sublime poetry into elementary images, harsh and eloquent in their simplicity. My friend Roland Barthes would define them as simple, syntagmatic shots, something in between Dreyer and Pasolini, with a bit of Ford, of course.⁷

Like any moral fable, Father Spagna's "Catholic western" is based on the effort to give "concrete and tangible" form to what he anticipates viewers will correctly interpret figuratively according to the orthodoxy of biblical exegesis. Just as in Poe, the barrier that blocks the mental leap from the "elementary" letter to the lofty figure must be ascribed to a "second voice" surreptitiously interfering with Father Spagna's earnest direct speech. This voice turns Spagna's "sublime poetry" into Fellini's parodic grotesque. Both the Catholic establishment and the biblical myth of the Redemption are "brought low" by their connection with the entertainment business, Hollywood blockbusters, and the contemporary fad of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, as the title of the film *Trenta dollari* suggests.

The facile and clichéd nature of Spagna's allegories is as suspiciously unintelligent as the literal readings of Poe's first-person narrator:

We want to build characters who are tied to our history and are part of a large sociological background, and who are replete with critical significance. For example, what do the two outlaws signify in our movie? A critique of the disinherited

classes who live their rebellion without any political awareness, in an anarchical and excessively extemporaneous way. . . . The singer with big breasts is the illusory escape into the irrational. The prairie is the region of the earth "without history," the buffalo are the means of subsistence for which man must fight. . . . The stampede near the end will be the characteristic escape into violence, outside of all organized struggle.⁸

Arguably, watching Terence Stamp impersonate a proto-Marxist Jesus carrying a Colt .45 in *Dodge City*, Kansas, may have provided a source of grotesque humor comparable to Toby Dammit playing the fallen prophet of transcendental thought in Poe's counterfable. Fellini, however, chose to place this Catholic western within creative parentheses and to stage his counterredemptive fable during the twelve hours that immediately follow Toby Dammit's landing in Rome, and just before the Vatican western's first take. This nocturnal period—the *in-between* where the adaptive encounter takes place—hosts a grotesque phantasmagoria that both repeats and exceeds Poe's disciplined exercise in this subversive mode.

Sharing Poe's parodic self-consciousness toward time-hallowed generic conventions, Fellini repeats themes, imagery, and formal codes of Shakespearean tragedy (*Macbeth*) and Christian comedy (Dante's *Comedy*) to create a grotesque hybrid that is both exploitative and subversive of its generic archetypes. Caught like *Macbeth* in the tangled web of fate, Toby embarks on a journey of damnation that turns Dante's ascensional allegory upside down.⁹ Toby's tragicomedy is divided into five acts, each of them shot in a different locale. Though a syntagmatic progression toward the protagonist's physical and psychic dissolution is obviously discernible, *Toby Dammit's* five acts are also connected on a paradigmatic level. Fellini thus creates a compact film that, like Shakespeare's plays and Visconti's *Ossessione*, is made of brilliant variations on returning themes, recurring images, and symbolic repetitions.

The defining of *Toby Dammit* as a tragicomedy is not based solely on the recognition that Fellini mingles the two illustrious generic archetypes provided by Shakespeare's tragedy and Dante's comedy. This definition is also tied to the awareness that the pastiche of allusions to both high and popular culture permeating *Toby Dammit* creates a dialogical and nonhierarchical space that mirrors the tragicomedy's hybrid domains. If Fellini leaves no reference free of parodic distortion, it is often in the intersecting of low- and highbrow models that he further emphasizes his parodic displacements. For example,

if, as Christopher Sharrett has proposed, Toby's southbound trip parodies the romantic topos of the journey to Italy upon which the Western artist embarks in hope of rejuvenation at the sacred fount of art and civilization (one can think of Goethe, Heine, Mann, Stendhal, and James), Fellini's satire becomes all the more poignant because this journey finds its debased equivalent and commercial counterpart in the actors who migrated to Rome to revamp their fame and refill their pockets in the Hollywood on the Tiber (Liz Taylor, Richard Burton, Steve Cochran, Lex Barker, and Clint Eastwood).

Unfortunately, Toby Dammit's journey to Italy is neither spiritually uplifting nor professionally rewarding. If Toby is apathetic about the details of the Catholic western in which he is supposed to star, Fellini's presentation of the film's ideology is a bitter travesty of earnest contemporary efforts to utilize the conventions of the western in order to estrange the genre's cultural assumptions, such as its cult of the self-reliant hero with his Manichean ethics and expansionistic hubris.¹⁰

Disjointed Subjects and Shifting Identities: *Toby Dammit's Performative Complexities*

The performative complexities examined in Poe also mark Fellini's *Toby Dammit*. They involve Fellini (the flesh-and-blood director), the implicit author/director (as the collective creative entity that Albert Laffay calls "le grand imagier," which includes director, screenwriter, cinematographer, music composer, director, costume and set designers, and film editor), the actor-protagonist with his own mises en abyme, and the author of the film's hypotext, Poe himself.¹¹ When Fellini filmed *Toby Dammit*, he was emerging from a debilitating physical illness and from the disappointment of *Il viaggio di G. Mastorna*. In words that recall Bertolucci's inspiration for *La strategia del ragno*, Fellini described this film as dealing with "a journey, imagined or dreamed, a journey into memory, into repression, into a labyrinth" (*Comments* 171). Fellini failed to complete this film because of his own creative difficulties, as well as persistent disagreements with the film's producers, first Dino De Laurentiis and then Alberto Grimaldi.

As a fading Shakespearean actor who has sold out to the blockbuster culture, Toby Dammit furnished a mirror image of Fellini himself, a director attempting to wrestle free from a professional crisis by adapting Poe for the commercial cinema while making a film about the challenges of the creative process

among the many trappings of the movie industry.¹² All these autobiographical cross-references involve the actor whom Fellini chose to play the role of Toby Dammit as well.¹³ Though, in 1968, Terence Stamp was one of the most popular faces in British cinema and the poster boy for the swinging 1960s lifestyle, he was already experiencing the personal and professional crisis that would lure him away from Europe and the big screen for much of the next decade.¹⁴ Moreover, by emphasizing Stamp's disheveled looks and incongruously outmoded clothing, Fellini casts him as a Poe stand-in, an unoriginal replica of an artist in a state of crisis. But as Poe's double, Toby is also the stereotypically "ideal" protagonist for an American International Pictures (AIP) adaptation of Poe.¹⁵ Fellini thus devised a mock horror movie that was both complicit with and parodic of the popularization of Poe in the series that AIP produced.

Oblique and nonmimetic, Fellini's film blurs the boundaries among these performative identities. Having the advantage of being able to exploit both visual and verbal narratives, in his adaptation Fellini challenges the rational dialectic of perception (with its stable opposition of objective and subjective realms) perhaps even more radically than Poe. In *Toby Dammit* conventional subject categories break down, and a phantasmagoria of fragments and elusive reflections replaces all sense of wholeness and originality of self. The film creates a space where identities are doubled and dislocated, perceptions unstable and shifting, cognitive paradigms ambivalent and decentered, and "reality" flagrantly mannered and made-up. Yet it is in this alienating and polymorphous space of failed performances, disjointed subjects, and unoriginal scripts that a film, phoenixlike, comes to life.

The film's establishing shot underscores Fellini's grotesque discordances as well as the "performative alliances" that these discordances inspire. *Toby Dammit* opens on a series of smoothly blended, downward moving pans of a blue sky dotted with cotton-candy clouds. As the color contrasts intensify, so do the changing angles of the sequential pans. The explosive yellow of the setting sun stands out against apocalyptic dark clouds as the viewer's eye seeks a compositional center from which to make sense retrospectively of the changing perspectives. A disembodied voice-over furnishes the auditory rather than visual point of origin to these shifting perspectives: "The plane kept circling over the airport as if it could not make up its mind whether to land. . . . It was the first time that I went to Rome and I had the impression that this trip that I had finally convinced myself to take would hold a great meaning for me. . . . For a moment I absurdly hoped that the plane would turn around and

bring me away, back home. But that was impossible. The airport's invisible strings had already captured the plane and were irresistibly pulling it towards the ground."¹⁶ The script identifies this voice-over as Dammit's. As the camera focuses, however, on the tight confines of the plane's cockpit, from which we see the narrow landing strip, it becomes apparent that there is a dislocation between voice and point of view. The camera's eye cannot realistically coincide with the view available to the first-person narrator, whom we imagine must be sitting in the main cabin with the rest of the passengers. A surreptitious third party—the film's director—is thus introduced between us and the mysterious voice-over narrator.

It has been argued that this is the point in the film where Toby switches from being a verbal narrator to becoming a visual one, the "director, as it were, of the film in which he is the tragic star actor" (Foreman 113). But the fact that this specific visual perspective would not be logically available to Toby the verbal narrator underscores that while suggesting reflections and similarities, Fellini also maintains a crucial margin of independence from Toby's vision. If the heavy use of the subjective camera progressively blurs such separation, the film's denouement depends, as we will see, on that very margin of independence. Fellini accentuates this uncanny sense of dislocation by continuing to defer direct human contact. A back shot of the two pilots landing the plane conceals the primary mark of identity, their faces, and the close-up and three-quarter shot of a crew member wearing dark glasses and headphones with multiple antennas defies humanity altogether, as he is made to resemble a snail-like mechanical hybrid.¹⁷ Similarly, the flight attendant who announces on the intercom the plane's imminent landing at Fiumicino Airport does not directly engage the camera with her gaze, and a round screen projecting an incorporeal head whose lip movements fail to match the voice announcing flight arrivals in Italian dominates the interior of the airport.

In the glass-enclosed airport lobby Fellini's signature sequence of long tracks maintains this feeling of displacement, as the apparently objective and detached camera eye captures a slice of life that is nightmarishly bizarre. We watch sleeping mummylike passengers, motionless like the mysterious bundles wrapped up in plastic that surround them; nuns carrying large instrument cases, silhouetted against a fiery red background, their black gowns swept by inexplicable gusts of wind; turbaned Muslims kneeling toward Mecca; a cripple on crutches; a catatonic woman between a thug and a uniformed man; a bearded Jew proceeding backward on an escalator; a young servant push-

ing a frantic aged dowager in a wheelchair. Slowly, the dynamics of perception reverse themselves, and these absurd samples of unrelated humanity are no longer the objects of the impassive camera eye, but it is the camera that becomes the object of these people's curious, shocked, or deadpan gazes. Thus strangely humanized, the camera lingers in front of a flower arrangement with two uncanny holes resembling eyes, and Terence Stamp appears in close-up, his blond hair and ghostly pale face brightly illuminated as he protects his eyes from the assault of the paparazzi's flashing cameras. It is only now, and in retrospect, that we are able to connect the unsettling images of the Roman airport to Toby's own idiosyncratic perceptions: unbeknownst to us, we were seeing the world through the eyes of a madman.

The airport scene climaxes in a surreal pantomime—"un'assurda mimica," in Fellini's script directions (Fellini and Zapponi 74): Toby spreads his arms out and up, as if ready to soar into flight, and then extends his hand to catch an invisible object in the air. Later, Toby reminisces about this event, and it is only within the context of his recollection that the scene fully unfolds



Figure 4.1. Toby's mysterious pantomime. American International Pictures/Photofest.



Figure 4.2. Moments of an outlandish ball game.

itself and becomes visually explicit. We see Toby catching a white ball that a pale doll-like girl, red-lipped and dressed in white, has tossed to him (figs. 4.1 and 4.2). Arguing, as Fellini critics do, that the recollected nature of these images underscores the fact that we are part of Toby's private mindscape is both obvious and inadequate.¹⁸ We must recognize that, though Fellini's filming has made us complicit with Toby's inner world, this complicity does not foster understanding. It rather emphasizes a sense of hermeneutical dislocation. Clearly, the silent "ball game" between the girl in white and Toby is as suggestive as it is cryptically symbolic: but symbolic of what? Like Poe, Fellini suggests that a literal, syntagmatic reading of his film is insufficient to produce understanding, and that other interpretations based on analogical doublings and metaphorical transfers are in order. Yet these paradigmatic interpretations are also subtly linked to Toby's idiosyncratic inner world, with the skewed perceptions and disturbed visions that, at this point, remain uncannily opaque and mysterious to us.

It is only through a switch in "subject positions" that the film's paradigmatic logic begins to yield meaning. The human parade that makes up Toby's first view of Fiumicino Airport makes sense if we combine the sequential structure that the tracking shot implies (what I called earlier the metonymic or syntagmatic axis) with a reading that in contrast engages the principles of similarity and analogy (the metaphoric or paradigmatic axis). Often impaired

in their physical or mental activities and dependent on others, all the airport denizens repeat one another in that they all belong to hierarchical organizations, as shown by the religious, military, or corporate uniforms they wear.¹⁹ It is within the confines of this multilayered power structure that Toby appears for the first time, his exterior subjection to the world of show business and corporate religion translating into the dependency on his inner specter, the girl in white. If, however, all these people “belong” to Toby’s subjective point of view, awareness of the analogical chain binding them together cannot convincingly be ascribed to him. It rather belongs to the bitter irony of the film’s director, whose subject position continues to shift from “identification with” to “separation from” his unfortunate protagonist in a brilliant cinematic rendition of the “internally dialogized . . . discourse” that Bakhtin studied in the novelistic genre (*The Dialogic* 324).

A similar sequence of apparently incongruous details constitutes the Roman sights that Toby sees from the hearselike limo that takes him to a TV studio for a celebrity interview. Engulfed in thick reds and yellows, the Eternal City shows few of its glorious architectural landmarks. Rome rather consists of atomized and ephemeral particulars, whose deeper connections are established this time through contrast rather than by analogy: a fragile woman surrounded by the diaphanous glass displays of a chandelier shop and thick gory sides of butchered beef showing from an open truck; a religious procession with a candlelit statue of the Virgin Mary parading in front of glass and steel office buildings; burly highway workers covered in soot sharing a construction site with birdlike models dressed in white gauzy gowns; homeless hippies loitering in an abandoned field with men in military band uniforms. Toby’s contrastive views do not resolve themselves in a moment of cognitive synthesis. Smog, darkness, sudden flashes, blinking lights, mist, and smoke continue to impair his perceptions as he is driven through a senseless maze of roadblocks, traffic jams, and detours.²⁰ Dialogue and understanding are also impaired: Father Spagna’s translator misses what is being said (“Something about vice, but I didn’t quite get the point”), and the gypsy who reads Toby’s palm refuses to tell him what she has discovered. Moreover, Toby sees only in fragments and through reflections: the heads of two men arguing; the legs of passengers descending from a bus; Father Spagna’s mouth captured in extreme close-up by the rearview mirror and his gesturing, disembodied hands.

Not only does the audience share Toby’s indirect and fragmented point

of view, but we see Toby himself as a mere reflection, a man cut in half. A close-up of Toby's face through the glare of the windshield makes him look decapitated from the start, and his identity becomes even more muddled with the superimposition of other images that the moving car's windshield reflects from the outside.²¹ Cartoon strips, movie posters, billboards, and a series of shooting-range targets in the shape of human heads and torsos, their hearts drawn in red, both substitute for and redouble Toby in the kind of metaphorical and sinisterly predictive commentary that we have learned to attribute to the director's own subject position and is reminiscent of Poe's first-person narrator. Here, as in the previous scene, Fellini's technical virtuosity guides the audience's smooth transition from being part of Toby's perceptual and cognitive space to sharing a different interpretative realm altogether—one that not only has the power to see Toby from the "outside" but also to infuse him with ominous proleptic and analogical intimations.

Thus split into segments and reflected doubles in a commercial world made of disconnected bits and pieces of humanity, Toby arrives at the TV studio. In a scene of staged authenticity for spectacle's sake, Toby sits on a black leather couch and fields the questions of a female interviewer dressed in a severe priestlike outfit (fig. 4.3). Unlike the previous scenes, Fellini's parodic engagement with his protagonist emerges here not so much from the split in their respective subject positions (or their different "horizons of understanding") but rather from the disconnection between verbal and visual narratives. Specifically, the verbal narrative is the tell-all interview in which Toby aggressively, if sometimes mockingly, discusses his career, life choices, childhood traumas, drug and alcohol addiction, medical conditions, and religious beliefs. If the visual *mise-en-scène* evokes a grotesque mix of Catholic confession, Freudian analysis, and talk-show prototype, Fellini's editing techniques involve allegedly "revealing" close-ups of Toby's face alternating with wide-angle shots of the studio. These wide-angle shots lay bare the very process of filmmaking, such as the multiple "expository and essentially fragmentary aspects of the include-eliminate process through which the image of the star is created and maintained" (Kovacs 258). Multiple cameras circle around Toby and capture him at different angles; bespectacled technicians in lab coats dispense canned laughter; and production assistants direct the interviewer's movements and control the timing of her questions. Along the entire length of the set's partition, giant posters feature blown-up montages of Toby's body parts: they are



Figure 4.3. Toby and his images in the world of mechanical reproduction. American International Pictures/Photofest.

collages made of close-ups and extreme close-ups of his face, eyes, mouth, legs, and feet reproduced in different colors and sizes and repeated in linear sequences of identical shots.

Similarly to Toby, the interviewer turns into her own image reproduced on a TV screen, while several small monitors capture different angles of Toby's face. While satisfying the viewer's curiosity regarding his private and professional life, Toby self-consciously displays himself here as chameleonic and changeable, an androgynous creature mechanically constructed to satisfy the public's voyeuristic desires. Editing and mise-en-scène demonstrate convincingly that the difference between the "real" Toby and the images of Toby has become immaterial: Toby is, indeed, the spliced man pinned to the studio's partition wall. In a meaningful addition to the script, an over-the-shoulder shot captures Toby looking back toward the set for a TV commercial, featuring a 1950s-style kitchen bathed in warm, inviting colors. Toby gazes on a scene of faux domesticity, where a sexy woman in a maid's outfit eagerly dances by

herself as attendants with a ladder and a mop clean up during a pause in the shooting of the commercial. When Toby absurdly asks the woman to marry him, she becomes two-dimensional, a grotesque puppet turning on hinges to face him. Compared to the first of Toby's inner visions (the girl in white), the mechanical maid is eminently "readable," and in the context of the previous scenes we are invited to see her in analogical terms. As a projection of Toby's narcissistic desires, she constitutes the symbolic doubling of Toby's own placement in the world of mechanical reproduction. Grotesque effects often emerge from the blurring of the frontiers between animate and inanimate objects, and writers have employed automatons and marionettes to such ends.²² Here Fellini enhances the intrinsic effects of this use of the grotesque to underscore the reification of a humanity subjugated to the endless repetition of the same that marks the solipsistic universe of mass production.

Unlike previous scenes, where metaphorical and analogical wisdom were beyond Toby's interpretative powers, the scene with the mechanical maid does not involve a cognitive split among different subject positions. The subjective camera emphasizes that Toby recognizes himself in the mechanical doll, designed to inspire consumer acquisition, and thus acknowledges his own lifelessness and alienation as something that he simultaneously desires and fears. Toby has no identity of his own, yet this is precisely what allows him to exist as an actor in the world of commercial illusion. But it is this awareness, deprived of the blissful distance of ignorance and the clever detachment of irony, that triggers his ultimate downfall.

Blind Artists and Their Visions: Fellini's Grotesque Doubles

As Toby further succumbs to his alcoholic stupor, Fellini's *mise-en-scènes* become increasingly grotesque. Invited to be one of the prize recipients at the "Italian Oscars" celebration (a grotesque copy of the Hollywood original), Toby enters a stage built in a nightclub, which reproduces the grounds of an ancient Roman bath.²³ Harsh spotlights, cameras on cranes, microphones, cables, steel structures, and a prefabricated catwalk sharply contrast with the flickering candlelight, the pool's undulating and steamy water, and the immemorial Roman walls. In this uncanny scenario, engulfed in mist and cigarette smoke, nothing is clear-cut, singular, or unique. In Fellini's callous visual translation of the "seeing double" cliché applied to intoxicated people, the

blatantly subjective camera captures pairs of fashion models in identical outfits whose upside-down reflections we glimpse in the pool's water. Reflected shadows also dance on the dimly lit walls, and two identical vaudeville performers can be separated only by the different colors of their suits.

The awards ceremony reaches its climax with the presentation of the "Lupa d'oro" statuettes, featuring the mythic She-Wolf nursing the twins Romulus and Remus. Among the winners are two conjoined freaks, the "Waltzing Twins" Tiger and Lion, and Annie Ravel and MaryLou Lolo, interchangeable starlets of vapid personality and voluptuous physique. Immobile props on this peculiar stage, three women masquerading as the Graces of classical myth create a background for three young actresses repeating identical formulas of thanks, while flashing cameras obsessively multiply all images on film. Here Toby meets Robert, his cowboy stand-in and stuntman, who orders twenty identical copies of his photograph with Toby, and Michele Stinelli, better known as D'Artagnan, a virtuoso who specializes in imitating other people's voices.

If Toby remains indifferent to the grotesque forms of repetition that these people provide, he cannot be equally cavalier about the uncanny doubling created by another awardee and guest of honor, a blind elderly comedian and mime. The comedian engages the soiree's host in a humorous dialogue aimed at ridiculing his own disability. Playing Literal Fool to the old man's wit, the host offers a grotesque reading of the old man's statement "Ho un occhio di gatto" ("I've got a cat's eye") by praising the wonders of modern medical transplants. It is precisely here—at the point of Fellini's most explicit act of homage to Poe's verbal grotesqueries—that Toby's complicit laughter turns into a grimace of pain: the sinister undertones of this droll scenario take the upper hand, and the comedy reveals its tragic side. As the blind comedian completes his piece, a sobbing Toby covers his eyes with his hands. Unlike the obtuse host, the tragic Shakespearean actor knows what destructive symbolic inner visions can emerge out of literal sightlessness.

At this point aural messages become prominent, as Nino Rota's soundtrack gives place to the slow melodies of Ray Charles's recorded voice. Isolated from the limelight and chitchat of the awards celebration, Toby sits alone, in darkness, listening to the blind American performer. Sung in Toby's native language, Charles's "Ruby" features a man who addresses an elusive seductress ("They say, Ruby you're like a dream / not always what you seem") who robs him of all emotional independence:

Right from the start, who stole my heart?
 Ruby, it's you
 I hear your voice and I must come to you
 I have no choice, so what else can I do?

And portends woes to come:

They say, Ruby you're like a song
 You just don't know right from wrong
 And in your eyes I see heartaches for me.

From the shadow a young woman approaches Toby and starts acting out the "Ruby" role. In a reversed mirror image of the situation played out by Ray Charles's lyrics, we watch a silent male artist who listens to Ruby's effusive promises of eternal love and blessed togetherness. The film's malicious splicing shows that Ruby's words are twice as hackneyed as those of the popular song, as each shot shows Ruby mimicking the feelings dictated by Ray Charles's aural prompts. But it is a hollow performance compared to Charles's musical wizardry: in spite of her consoling words, Ruby's deadpan and mechanical acting shows little emotional participation. Arguably, the identical close-ups of her red lips and pale complexion cast her as a mature double of the girl in white who had haunted Toby on his arrival in Rome, while her robotic acting makes her a sister to the mechanical maid of the TV studio. As Ray Charles's song fades away, Ruby closes her eyes, prompting Toby to repeat exactly the same action, captured in close-up. Inspired by Ray Charles's lyrics, Toby's inner vision turns out to be a stale yet frightening rendition of a cinematic cliché, that of the emasculating femme fatale who, together with sight and voice, robs the male artist of all originality and spontaneity.

After this frightful revelation, Toby is summoned onto the stage.²⁴ Upon failing to complete one of Macbeth's most famous soliloquies—

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (5.5.24–28)

—Toby depicts his personal inferno in a pained drunken confession. His broken narrative of the sad visions provoked by wine and the uncanny ones by

whisky is quintessentially grotesque, and one cannot but pair Shakespeare with the other great master of the grotesque, the oracle of the *Dive Bouteille*, Rabelais. Unable to find his real self inside the many staged ones, Toby, now bearer of the tragic wisdom of the Shakespearean Fool, realizes that his tale is one of alienation and grotesque repetition, himself a walking shadow that we see reflected on the wall as he flees in terror from this *unheimlich* Roman hell.

That his escape will be a fruitless effort was foreshadowed in the beginning of the film when Toby's airplane monologue introduced the idea of fate in his predestined journey to Rome. Toby's story is already written out—just like his American predecessor's, just like Macbeth's. He is performing a role that a malignant puppet master has prefigured for him according to a tragically deterministic plot. Lombardi, the production assistant and Toby's guide in Rome's wretched demimonde of would-be celebrities and faded glories, may well be a grotesque allusion to Dante's epic (the Gran Lombardo being Bartolomeo della Scala but evoking, *latu sensu*, also Virgil, the Mantuan guide to Dante through Inferno and Purgatory). Lombardi, however, has no redemptive message for Toby. On the contrary, he foreshadows Toby's fate, as his handkerchief, bordered in mourning black, parallels the black scarf around Toby's neck and functions as cryptic anticipation of Toby's demise.²⁵ With Lombardi as the anti-Virgil, Toby's women are the grotesque counterparts to Dante's redemptive ones. If the grotesque sisters of *La vita nuova's* Beatrice are the girl in white and the mechanical maid, light-giving Lucia is the Ruby who locks his eyes shut, and, with a quintessentially Felliniesque move, the foil to the Virgin Mary turns out to be a Ferrari.

Coveted gift for his Rome trip from the film's producers, Toby's Ferrari sits in the middle of an empty lot, illuminated by spotlights yet engulfed in mist, its polished body shifting in color from dark yellow to red as the camera pans around it in a protracted embrace (fig. 4.4). As enthralling and mysterious as the divas that it parodies grotesquely, the Ferrari is under the watch of a gangster-type in dark glasses, who tosses the car keys to Toby as he informs him that "*è già rodato*" ("it's already broken in"). Toby takes the driver's seat and moans in pleasure in a rare expression of physical well-being, slowly caressing the Ferrari's steering wheel and its gearshift. Mimicking the camera work conventionally employed to introduce spectacular divas such as Marlene Dietrich and the "divine" Greta Garbo, Fellini's titillating presentation of Toby's Ferrari is replete with Freudian innuendos. In their humorous obviousness, not only do these symbols enrich Fellini's satire of the stock cinematic



Figure 4.4. Toby's Ferrari and its protector.

techniques that conventionally direct the male gaze across the female body, but they also introduce the grotesque theme of the love affair between an anthropomorphized machine and a dehumanized human being.

Toby's tortuous ride along uneven country lanes, deserted city neighborhoods, suburban roads, and winding medieval streets is uncanny and illogical in its mixture of unconnected topographies and nonlinear chronology. Walls, barriers, detours, and roadblocks persistently impede Toby's forward progress. The signs of modernity (freeways under construction, gas stations, trucks, and road repair crews) mix with the emblems of a primeval world untouched by time and progress (dirt roads, shepherds and their flock, a lone donkey) in what is an interior landscape of nightmarish intensity. In Toby's labyrinthine inner journey the only recurring element is one of dehumanization. The "subject who barely exists," to cite Christopher Sharrett's definition (130), becomes more and more disembodied, less and less "human," as he engages in a roaring match with the Ferrari's engine, gets lost in a maze of dead-end streets, unsuccessfully asks directions from a mentally challenged cripple, and obtains them from a masked man squatting doglike on all fours in the doorway of a tent. Eerie life-size wood cutouts of *trattoria* cooks look intermittently two-dimensional and alive, as their extended hands seem to indicate which direction Toby must take.

In their script directions Fellini and his cowriter, Bernardino Zapponi,

stated that Toby's journey was to take place among "theatrical and mysterious perspectives" flaunting their contrived staginess.²⁶ Following the conventions of a Greek tragedy, Fellini does not show Toby's decapitation onstage, and critics perceptively argued that in its artificial *mise-en-scène* Toby's death, just like Guido's in *8½*, "is only 'presumed.' . . . It is not a literal event but an act of the imagination" (Foreman 121). Once again, the doubt arises whether what is taking place in the world of the film is "really happening" according to "standard narrative rules about which we suspend disbelief, or whether events are merely the projection and fantasy of the protagonist" (Sharrett 124). By the time we see Toby's severed head in the same frame as the girl in white and her ball, Fellini's filming strategies have accustomed us to interpreting the girl as a construct of Toby's subjective vision, a mere figment of his hallucinated inner world. Given the increasingly grotesque *mise-en-scène*, however, we could also play *Literal Fools* to Fellini's uncanny shot and experience the sense of displacement resulting from sharing the subjective point of view of a headless individual. And, finally, we could argue that the implicit union of the camera eye with Toby's point of view allows one to superimpose Fellini's "subject position" on Toby's and to see Toby's fateful demise in figural terms as the end not of a single individual but of a symbol: that of the scapegoat.

Fellini's I/Eye and the Meaning of Adaptation

By compressing, yet not blurring, all these subject positions in a close sequence of shots, Fellini draws attention to the shots' semiotic pregnancy and makes them the turning point that sets off the film's denouement. If Toby remains captive to his private demons, Fellini's margin of independence from his character's subjective vision invests Toby with a mythical, cross-temporal significance. The scene's surreal space and time condensations place Toby in the realm of collective rites and ancient lore, and the more he loses consistency and form as a whole individual, the more he acquires it as a figure. The core of Fellini's creative paradox lies in the fact that the symbolic sacrifice of the artist isolated in his own inner visions and trapped in the dehumanizing world of show business signals a moment of rebirth. The bleak dawn in the film's penultimate shot underscores the end of the long night of Fellini's physical and professional "illness." But it is precisely this long night that has nurtured Fellini's creative imagination. While daybreak may conventionally

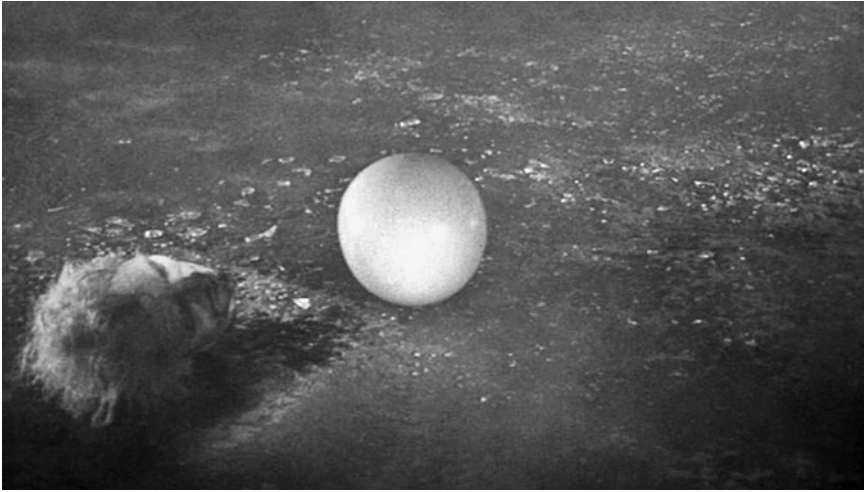


Figure 4.5. Stage props: Toby's head and the mysterious ball.

be the symbol of a new beginning, it also marks the concrete end of *Toby Dammit*. The creative space of the film, included between the first shot, with the caption "liberamente tratto" ("loosely adapted"), and the last shot, with a smiling portrait of Edgar Allan Poe, underscores that Fellini's rebirth occurs under the aegis of aesthetic self-consciousness and grotesque parody: Toby gazing upon his own severed head (fig. 4.5).

With Toby's staged death, Fellini ridiculed horror movie conventions by flaunting the mechanical tricks that normally conjure up an atmosphere of terror. What should be the climaxing horror scene in any AIP translation of any of Poe's tales collapses into self-conscious kitsch, as Fellini shows Toby's decapitated head to be a patently fake rubber prop, an intentionally bad replica of the original item, which destroys the horror film's necessary *suppression* of disbelief.²⁷ Forced to recognize the artifice at the expense of conventional "immersion in the illusion" (LeGrice 230), viewers become active contributors to Fellini's parodic creative process. It is precisely this parodic and grotesque twist that grants Fellini's film a margin of independence from the many commercial adaptations of Poe's works. Toby's staged death is also an allegory of Fellini's relationship to Poe and of his "free" adaptation of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."

René Girard provides a masterful reading of one of the archetypal behead-



Figure 4.6. Francesco Rustici (c. 1595–1626), *Salomé*. Oil on canvas, 218 cm × 156 cm. Museum of Fine Arts (Szepmuveszeti Muzeum), Budapest, Hungary. Copyright Museum of Fine Arts Budapest/Scala/Art Resource, New York. Used by permission.

ings of Western culture, that of Saint John the Baptist in the Gospel of Mark (fig. 4.6):

Tradition recognizes Salome as a great artist, and powerful traditions are never established without reason. But what is that reason? . . . When Herodias [Salome's mother] gives her daughter the [order to ask Herod for John's head] she is not thinking of decapitation. In French as in Greek to ask for someone's head is to demand his death. The part is taken for the whole. Herodias's answer does not

refer to a precise method of execution. . . . Even in countries where beheading is customary, to demand someone's head must be understood rhetorically, whereas Salome takes it literally. . . . A too literal interpretation results in a misinterpretation through a lack of understanding. The inaccuracy of the copy is a result of an excessive concern for accuracy. What appears to be most creative in the role of Salome is really what is most mechanical and hypnotic in the submission to the chosen model. All great aesthetic ideas are the same, narrowly, obsessively imitative. Traditionally, art is only spoken of in terms of mimesis. (136–37)

Unlike the dancing girl Salome, Fellini is not a naive reader of his chosen model. From what appears to have been an insightful rather than cursory reading of Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Fellini has learned what must be understood rhetorically, what literally, and what grotesque images can be created from taking literally what should be a figure of speech.

The death of Toby Dammit, like the murder of Professor Quadri in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, is a figural death, by which Fellini stages his attempts to exorcise the nightmare of the double and to overcome the fear of unoriginality that he so candidly acknowledged by casting Terence Stamp as a replica of Poe. But in its patent visual phoniness Toby's beheading is a grotesquely literal rendition of a symbolic trope, and as such, it is also Fellini's highest act of homage to the author of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." By conceding that "traditionally art is only spoken of in terms of mimesis," with *Toby Dammit* Fellini argues that it is through the distorting lens of the grotesque, with its estranging repetitions, that the modern artist can battle the specters of alienation and achieve a creative, if mediated, catharsis.

Depending on their cultural background and personal sensibilities, Fellini's critics have explained *Toby Dammit's* climactic scene as a parody of the "hot car" American movies, a parody of Corman's often crass psychoanalytical readings of Poe (Sharrett), and a parody of westerns (Burke). In light of Poe's literal use of proverbial phrases to elicit grotesque humor, one could also read Fellini's final scene as a parodic reversal of the poetic imagery of Rilke's "Solang du Selbstgeworfnes fängst" and a cynical negation of all faith-based hermeneutics. But limiting oneself to finding one source for Fellini's parody is missing the grand design of the filmmaker's grotesqueries. By combining references to popular culture and B movies with classical archetypes and the great works of Western high culture, Fellini creates a parodic and grotesque composite. This composite is made with the unconnected fragments of a tra-

dition that has lost its claim to canonic design and has crushed all hierarchies of value. Although unoriginal duplicates in and of themselves, these fragments constitute the core of the adaptive process as, in their estranged repetitions and parodic distortions, they decry the “inadequacy of a system intent on reproducing, on appropriating the original” (Géloin 139). To “fragment the old text of culture, science, literature,” wrote Barthes, means expropriating and rupturing the language of received authority in order to inscribe it in a new multivoiced context that allows for changed intentions and plurality of interpretations (*Sade* 10). The subversive margin of creative freedom that is Poe’s tongue-in-cheek legacy to Fellini results from the acknowledgment that the adaptive effort occurs at the intersection of a series of multilayered discursive systems—in the *in-between*, where the transformative encounter among discourses already saturated with prior meanings occurs.

India through the Looking Glass

The Narrative Heritage of the West and Antonio Tabucchi's *Notturmo indiano*

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. . . . What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it.

T. S. ELIOT, "TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT"

The word "precursor" is indispensable in the vocabulary of criticism, but one should not try to purify it from every connotation of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.

JORGE LUIS BORGES, "KAFKA AND HIS PRECURSORS"

Like all of Tabucchi's fiction, *Notturmo indiano* redefines the notion of originality by rejecting all pretensions of uniqueness and creative independence and embracing the agoraic domain of intertextual exchanges and self-referential mises en abyme.¹ From his sustained dialogue with the much-admired Fernando Pessoa and his many doppelgängers, to his explicit indebtedness to Pirandello's and Borges's metafictional ironies, Tabucchi shares what Philippe Lejeune and Gérard Genette defined as the "palimpsestuous" and self-reflective nature of much postmodern narrative. *Notturmo indiano* is indeed a "text in the second degree," a text, that is, that adapts "previously constituted models of generic competence" by involving them in a transformative process (Genette, *Palimpsests* 5). Specifically, *Notturmo indiano* mirrors some of the narrative paradigms with which the West gave imaginative form to India, yet it repeats these paradigms ironically. Tabucchi subverts the models of the grand imperial epics and Universal Histories that from Europe "returned" to India to discover humankind's origins by combining them with the popular genres of the detective and mystery novels. If the narrator's journey to the "cradle of the world" reveals no collective sense of selfhood, his detective search for an

elusive individual compounds rather than resolves the mystery. Progressively, in fact, the narrator's quest is flipped upside down, and pursuer and pursued become shifting mirror images, paradoxically and simultaneously chasing and fleeing each other.²

The Nietzschean narrative scene of *Notturmo indiano* thus both evokes and challenges our assumptions of "causality and temporal homogeneity, linearity, and continuity" and problematizes our beliefs in "origins and ends, unity and totalization, logic and reason, consciousness and human nature, progress and fate, representation and truth" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 87). Having destabilized traditional notions of unified and stable identities, and having subjected conventional modes of emplotment to the other logic of paradigmatic recurrences and uncanny doublings, Tabucchi's novella raises fundamental questions about the cognitive status of narrative understanding as a culturally determined and ideologically constructed process. Rather than providing univocal answers, the hermeneutical encounters so assiduously sought in *Notturmo indiano* retain all the power and display all the limitations of "a certain avowed provisionality" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 90) in the awareness that India is not an empirical object that can be discovered and represented *ex novo*. As both intertextual and extratextual reality, India can only be revisited "with irony, non innocently" (Eco, *Postscript* 67)—adapted, that is, through the filter of the varied scripts and experiences that allow us to engage in the process (rather than reaching the goal) of *knowing* ourselves and the world in which we live.

An introductory note in *Notturmo indiano* separates, in an interesting game of mirrors, the identity (and therefore the voice) of the writer (signed "A. T.") from the identity of the character who traveled to India: "As well as being an insomnia, this book is also a journey. The insomnia belongs to the writer of the book, the journey to the person who did the travelling" (Tabucchi, *Indian Nocturne* [hereafter *IN*] vi).³ Though the use of a first-person narrator apparently mends this split identity, numerous ambiguities persist throughout the story. The narrator's estranging and incongruous itineraries in a nocturnal land are inspired by the written word—letters sent and received, ancient colonial manuscripts examined or waiting to be discovered in libraries that are "almost unknown in the West" (*IN* 59).⁴ Trips to the book-lined quarters of the Theosophical Society in Madras and the library of the Jesuit Fathers in Goa demonstrate that the narrator's India exists as a catalogue of European texts as much as a firsthand experience of places and people met during a series of

enigmatic pilgrimages. The narrator's quest is a search for ancient colonial chronicles, for a writer-friend who is the author of novels that have been destroyed, and for a narrative inspiration that mixes the actual trip with its narrative, life with fiction, and the self with an enigmatic and elusive stranger.⁵ Similarly, the insomniac writer (alert, rational) who bases his journey on the factual and syntagmatic accuracy of the popular Lonely Planet guide entitled *India, a Travel Survival Kit*, is both separated from and blended with the protagonist, Rouxinol/Nightingale, whose very name evokes the nocturnal and Keatsian dimension of oneiric journeys and paradigmatic narrative structures.

Tabucchi's Counterquest between Epic and Detective Novel

I have argued elsewhere that one of the hypertexts for *Notturmo indiano* is Guido Gozzano's collection of prose works entitled *Verso la cuna del mondo: Lettere dall'India* (*Toward the Cradle of the World: Letters from India*).⁶ Both narratives are first-person accounts of a trip to India. Both provide explicit connections between the protagonist of the journey and the historical author, with the aim of subverting rather than resolving the apparent transitivity between referential and textual spaces. Neither Gozzano nor Tabucchi is really after the discovery of a mysterious and remote continent. They rather explore the narrative paradigms that have allowed the West to *represent* India, thus drawing attention to the cultural and ideological presuppositions and "pre-judgments" that brought India into the "hermeneutical consciousness" of the West (Gadamer, *Truth* 456). Finally, both Gozzano and Tabucchi see the trip to India as an existential quest, as well as an assessment of the power and the limitations of narrative as a way to build personal and collective identities.

Besides these obvious thematic similarities, Gozzano's *Toward the Cradle of the World* engaged Tabucchi's interest because of its mixed and unresolved epistemologies. The title *Toward the Cradle of the World* exhumes the century-long quest for the origins of humanity that supplied foundations to nations and cultures through the creation of the collective genealogical myths that inspired the Universal Histories' monumental narratives. Surprisingly, after evoking it, Gozzano shattered the historical resilience of this foundational myth with a statement of epistemological and ontological alienation: "The Westerner who returns to India," he wrote in a piece entitled "The Dance of a Devadasi," "does not recognize his cradle any longer."⁷ The Westerner's

shocked inability to discover an original Indo-European “sameness” does not involve any conversation with Asian difference in Gozzano. Rather, it involves the melancholy degradation of one of the founding codes of Western imperialism, that of the epic.

In the “letter” that Tabucchi evokes more closely, “Goa: ‘La dourada,’” Gozzano exploits, and sadly subverts, one of the epic’s fundamental themes, that of the quest. To the colossal pursuits of epic heroes (*sapientia mundi* and immortality, *salus et amor, virtute e canoscenza*), Gozzano opposes his own degraded personal quest. Leaving his friends in Bombay, he travels alone to Goa, just like Tabucchi’s protagonist, and engages in a solipsistic and inexplicable search for “the unknown brother of a forgotten friend,” a Franciscan missionary by the name of Vico Verani.⁸ Gozzano’s wanderings in the nightmarish city reveal that all that appears familiar to his European eyes is only a hollow surface, pervaded by sinister sadness. Of the great Portuguese churches and palaces all that is left is ruins: “everything has tumbled down.”⁹ Like any fragmented and polyvalent object, the ruin demands semiotic interpretation, as it points in two opposite directions: it both indicates a former totality and exposes this totality’s absence, thus defining the Asian present as emptiness filled with half-erased European traces.

For Gozzano, depleting the present of epic possibilities means also negating the temporal model on which the epic plot is traditionally organized. Once in the cradle of the world, Gozzano fails to decipher the code revealing the origins of all that is to come. In a world where the first Word is absent or incomprehensible, history cannot follow a progressive order. The only Word that permeates this repetitive history states the disquieting, because rationally undecipherable, presence of an absence: “Nobody knows Vico Verani. . . . The solitude seems more complete, . . . now that I know that I have been following the trail of a dead man in a dead city.”¹⁰ Gozzano’s futile yet stubborn quest for Vico Verani in the baroque Inferno of Goa yields only one revelation: the collapse of the ideological and aesthetic templates on which, for centuries, the West had fed its imperial dreams and drafted its colonizing projects.

Tabucchi’s *Notturmo indiano* combines Gozzano’s theme of the failed quest with suggestions coming from popular forms such as detective and mystery novels. The first-person narrator of *Notturmo indiano* is summoned to India by a letter. The sender is the girlfriend of a Portuguese man named Xavier Janata Pinto, who has mysteriously disappeared in India. The plot of *Notturmo indiano*

reveals that the narrator's quest for Xavier—which, like Gozzano's, culminates in Goa—is indeed a quest for his own identity. Gozzano's existential unease becomes Tabucchi's analysis of the values and limitations of what Gadamer optimistically called the “universality of understanding,” as the shared human ability of interpreting the self and the world, and effectively communicating this knowledge to others (Gadamer, *Truth* xxxvii).

With a parodic process comparable to Gozzano's, Tabucchi lowers the theme of the quest from the classical heights of the epic to the popular level of the detective and mystery novels. If Gozzano's allegedly personal “letters” became allegorical narratives of the triumph and downfall of Western imperialism, the narrator's quest in *Notturmo indiano* is an intensely personal adventure, a “pilgrimage, . . . but not in the religious sense of the word . . . , a private journey” (IN 28).¹¹ Granting that Universal Histories and grand epic narratives belong to the past that preceded modernity's nostalgic subversions, Tabucchi suggests that postmodernism inherited modernity's desecrating attitudes but drastically limited their scope. Once the sense of nostalgia for consoling and universalizing master narratives is overcome, the postmodern author severs his individual history from all universalizing associations. He is emulated, at most, by those who share with him the passion for his “unlikely itineraries” (IN iii)¹² across discontinuous and fragmentary territories: “It is very difficult to have a totalizing and unitary vision on a reality that is so mixed and complex and I would say full of holes like ours. . . . In this world that has become absolutely relative writing also becomes relative, as does the representation of reality.”¹³

It is not surprising that once the paradigm of the quest is modified, the formulas of the detective and mystery novels also undergo significant changes. All quests depend on a teleological narrative. The plot progresses toward a goal that in the case of the traditional mystery and detective stories coincides with the solution of the enigma, and in the classical quest allows for a metaphysical and/or existential epiphany. As Poe's narrative prototypes show, mystery and detective novels impose the order of the intellect on ambiguous and gothic settings. The detective's mind exploits inductive and deductive reasoning and conducts acts of selection, ordering, and interpretation that allow him to compose the *disjecta membra* of the real into unitary and organic shapes, filling the gaps of a world that is no longer irrational and illegible. In its often mechanical and stylized codification the plot of a conventional de-

tective story is an extraordinarily closed structure: the authority of the writer over his narrative materials mirrors the detective's mastery of the case he is unraveling.

In *Notturmo indiano* the relationship between subject and reality, and therefore, between the first-person narrator and his *récit*, complicates this formula. Initially, the protagonist is part of a world that exploits all the clichés of the mystery and the detective novel: "India is mysterious by definition" (IN 33),¹⁴ the narrator declares, summoning up all the stereotypes of an undecipherable continent, dangerous and alien from his luminous Mediterranean world. With Sam Spade's trained nonchalance, the protagonist thwarts the tricks of a sinister taxi driver and does not become intimidated by the squalor of the Cage District in Bombay or by the two gangster-types who control the equivocal hotel in which he has reserved a room. Exploiting the *lingua franca* of money, he manages to contact Vimala, the prostitute with whom Xavier lived before disappearing, and forces her to undergo the typical interrogation: "'How come [Xavier] ended up in this place?' I asked. 'What was he doing here? Where is he now?'" (IN 9).¹⁵ From the variety of information that the narrator obtains from Vimala, he separates those bits that are potentially useful from those that are extraneous or unessential.¹⁶ Xavier's illness, his correspondence with the Theosophical Society in Madras, and his enigmatic business in Goa are the clues upon which the narrator concentrates. It is therefore logical that the plot should proceed with his visit to the Breach Candy Hospital in Bombay, the Theosophical Society in Madras, and the city of Goa.

As is the case with the conventional detective story, in the attempt to solve the mystery of his vanished friend, the narrator-detective tests his hermeneutical abilities. Absurd, incongruous, and unexplainable facts haunt the detective novel in order to highlight the detective's analytical skills. It is not surprising that in Tabucchi's nocturnal India names rarely correspond to things, signifiers to signifieds, and gestures to their conventional meanings: "From far away came a slow monotonous voice, a prayer perhaps, or a solitary, hopeless lament. . . . I found it impossible to make out any words. India was this too: a universe of flat sounds, undifferentiated, indistinguishable" (IN 26).¹⁷ What is surprising is that, in a perverse *gioco del rovescio*, in *Notturmo indiano* what is perceived by the Western observer as the ambiguous plurality and lack of logic of the Indian environment ends up "contaminating" the detective himself.

Rather than being the detached spectator able to decipher a reality that eventually becomes univocal and unequivocal, the narrator becomes part of

a changing universe of fictions. His unitary and rational identity is progressively fragmented into multiple and shifting surfaces. "[I had] the perfect sensation of being just two eyes watching while I myself was elsewhere, without knowing where" (*IN* 25),¹⁸ the narrator confesses just before boarding the boat that should take him to Elephanta island at the end of chapter 3. In the following chapter all references to Elephanta are abandoned. In a narrative ellipsis, the counterpart of an abrupt cinematic cut, we find the protagonist in one of the Railway Retiring Rooms of Victoria Station in Bombay, waiting for the train to Madras.¹⁹ During another stop in the narrator's journey, this time during the bus trip toward Mangalore, a Jain "prophet" provides him with this disconcerting revelation:

"You are someone else."

"Oh really," I said, "who am I?"

. . . "It doesn't matter," . . . "that's only *maya*."

"And what is *maya*?"

"It's the outward appearance of the world, . . . but it's only illusion, what counts is the *atma*." . . .

"And what is the *atma*?"

. . . "The Soul," he said, "the individual soul." . . .

"Well then, if I'm another person, I'd like to know where my *atma* is, where it is now." . . .

"You are on a boat." (*IN* 51–53)²⁰

As in Gozzano's case, references to a simplified and popular Hinduism destabilize the ontological certainties of the West. In *Notturmo indiano* these references question the very structure of the narrative with the suspicion that we have been following the quest of the "wrong" protagonist, the "correct" one having gone to Elephanta without us. Rather than generating a clear hermeneutical path, the text is as unreliable and hybrid as its narrator. The proliferation of tangential paths creates detours and gaps in the logical process of detection and gives a sense of displacement, of "things not meshing" (Spiegel 172). Superfluous and irrelevant data take the upper hand in a narrative that, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, we can define as rhizomatic.²¹ The plot of *Notturmo indiano*, it turns out, has little to share with the rational economy of the detective novel or the linear progress of the quest—yet it repeats both, while subverting them at the same time.

Indeed, Tabucchi often juxtaposes the paradigms of the detective novel

and the quest in *Notturmo indiano*. At the Breach Candy Hospital of Bombay, for example, the narrator abandons the role of the detective to play that of the pilgrim. He entrusts himself to a guide, a medical doctor who paradoxically shares his name with Ganesh, the merry Hindu God of knowledge, and asks his help to find Xavier in a crumbling hell of meaningless suffering. If the physician encourages the narrator to leave his European prejudgments aside and stop looking for concrete answers in the patients' archives, his melancholy conversation does not offer alternative hermeneutical tools, only negative revelations: "He plunged his arms . . . amongst the pieces of paper. 'So many people,' he said. . . . 'Dust'" (IN 15).²² In turn, the narrator explains to the doctor that in spite of the homonymy with Saint Francis Xavier, his friend Xavier was not in India to export metaphysical "truths" but to follow ancestral traces: "I think that one of his ancestors was from Goa" (IN 12).²³ The solipsistic search for Xavier's origins translates itself into its parodic and humorous opposite: "[Xavier] is Portuguese, but he didn't come as a missionary; he's a Portuguese who lost his way in India" (IN 12).²⁴ Simultaneously, the narrator's quest loses its objective connotations to reveal uncanny reflections, as when the doctor asks him whether he has a photograph of Xavier: "It was a simple, practical question, but I hesitated over the answer, for I too felt the weight of memory, and at the same time, I sensed its inadequacy. What does one remember of a face in the end? No, I didn't have a photograph, I only had my memory: and my memory was mine alone, it wasn't describable, it was the look I remembered on Xavier's face. I made an effort and said: 'He's the same height as I am, thin, with straight hair; he's about my age'" (IN 14).²⁵

Memory is one of the greatest allies of the detective's investigative processes. Stefano Tani points out that "the traditional detective novel presents a reconstruction of the past and ends when this reconstruction has been fulfilled. . . . The detective 'wins' the past, unravels it" (45). By giving up the ambition to "know" the past in an objective manner, Tabucchi's narrator produces idiosyncratic memories that create a disenchanted infraction of the rules of detection and discovery. When Ganesh asks him whether he should convey Xavier a message, should he find him, the narrator surprisingly replies: "No thanks, . . . don't say anything'" (IN 20).²⁶

In *Notturmo indiano* the only "knowable" past belongs to the nocturnal territories between involuntary memory and dreams. The Jesuit library in Goa is a monument to the religious and imperial certainties of a defunct world, and it is here that the protagonist dreams about having a conversation with

a theatrical and prescient Alfonso de Albuquerque. Albuquerque unmasks the real reason for the narrator's trip to India. This reason is not only his academic commitment to archival research but also his quest for Xavier:

"And who is Xavier?" . . .

"Xavier is my brother," I lied.

" . . . Xavier doesn't exist," he said. "He's nothing but a ghost." He made a gesture that took in the whole room. "We are all dead, haven't you realized that yet? I am dead. And this city is dead, and the battles, the sweat, the blood, the glory and my power, all dead, all utterly in vain."

"No," I said, "there is always something [that] survives."

"What?" he demanded. "His memory? Your memory? These books?"

He took a step toward me and . . . with his boot he kicked a little bundle that lay at his feet, and I saw it was a dead mouse. He shifted the creature across the floor and grunted with derision: "Or this mouse?" He laughed again and his laughter froze my blood. "I am the Pied Piper of Hamelin!" he cried. Then his voice became friendly, called me professor. (*IN* 60)²⁷

Existential as well as academic—it is here that he is called professor for the first time—the narrator's quest reaches a turning point in Goa. Tabucchi reiterates Gozzano's point that Goa's colonial vestiges display the cultural failure of Western civilization and that the hermeneutical quest among these ruins is both useless and sterile. However, unlike in Gozzano's "Goa: 'La dourada,'" in *Notturmo indiano* the explicit condemnation of Western civilization does not end up in nihilistic renunciations but rather triggers another memory for the narrator and, with it, another form of interpretive engagement. Oneiric and theatrical, this Proustian memory offers the greatest revelation in the novel:

The room was impressive. . . . The windows opened onto the Arabian Sea. . . . The heavy curtains of green velvet ran sweetly softly as a theatre curtain; I drew them across the scene and the room was reduced to half-light and silence. The lazy, comforting hum of the big fan lulled me . . . when suddenly I found myself at an old chapel on a Mediterranean hillside. . . . [I was] seeing that distant scene. . . . I remembered . . . the nicknames we gave each other, Xavier's guitar and Magda's shrill voice announcing in mock serious tones, like a fairground showman: "Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please, we have among us The Italian Nightingale!" And I would play along with her and launch into old Neapolitan songs, mimicking the out-dated warbling of singers in the old days. . . .

Amongst ourselves, and I was resigned to it, I was “Roux,” short for Rouxinol, Portuguese for nightingale. (IN 23)²⁸

This scene initiates a detection process based on the analogical clues that orient the narrator in the labyrinth of a prelogical and dreamlike India.²⁹ If, in one of Xavier’s letters to the director of the Theosophical Society, the narrator had read the cryptic sentence “I’ve become a night bird” (IN 71),³⁰ in Goa he has a momentous intuition: “The moon rose. It had a yellow halo and was full and blood-coloured. I thought, red moon, and instinctively I started whistling an old song. The idea came like a short circuit. I thought of a name, Roux, and then immediately of those words of Xavier’s: ‘I have become a night bird’; and then everything seemed so obvious” (IN 71).³¹

In spite of all accessory and irrelevant elements, deceiving clues, and incongruous patterns, the resolution of the mystery becomes possible because the detective combines logical and analogical strategies. One can only think about the “double” M. Dupin, whom Poe introduces in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”: “Observing him . . . I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin,—the creative and the resolvent” (144). But, if the search for “Mr. Nightingale” successfully ends in Goa,³² as we will see, the question about who Mr. Nightingale really is remains open, in a context that confounds the relationship between self and other, subject and object of the quest: Rouxinol and Nightingale. By disintegrating the oppositional logic on which the concept of identity is built, *Notturmo indiano* creates plural and deterritorialized identities—fictitious and discontinuous subjects that join and separate, and mirror and reverse, the “I” and “Thou” subject positions at each step of their nocturnal journey.³³

If between Roux and Mr. Nightingale we see the specters of Poe’s doppelgängers, the connection with Poe also suggests a metaliterary reading of the protagonist’s quest. In the theatrical scenario of the Hotel Oberoi in Goa, Roux meets Christine and, reversing the roles of the initial conversation between the narrator and Vimala, here it is Christine who plays the role of the investigator and interrogates Roux:

“So what do you do?” . . .

“Well, let’s suppose I’m writing a book, for example.”

“What kind of book?”

“A book.”

"A novel?" asked Christine with a sly look.

"Something like that."

"So you're a novelist," she said with a certain logic.

"Oh no," I said, "it's just an experiment, my job is something else, I look for dead mice."

"Come again?"

"I was joking," I said. "I scour through old archives, I hunt for old chronicles, things time has swallowed up. It's my job, I call it dead mice." . . .

"Tell me about your novel, come on," she said. . . .

"But it's not a novel," I protested, "it's a bit here and a bit there, there's not even a real story, just fragments of a story." (IN 79–80)³⁴

The protagonist, whom we have known as an academic (among other things), introduces himself as *an artist* here. More Gozzano than Proust, he vaguely describes a fictional universe made of fragments and small things rather than grand narratives. Christine, however, is not satisfied with the narrator's evasive answers and wants to know "the substance" and "the concept" of his novel:

"In the book I would be someone who has lost his way in India," I said quickly, "That's the concept."

"Oh no," said Christine, "that's not enough, you can't get off so lightly, there must be more to it than that."

"The central idea is that in this book I am someone who has lost his way in India," I repeated. "Let's put it like that. There is someone else who is looking for me, but I have no intention of letting him find me. I saw him arrive and I followed him day by day, we could say. I know his likes and his dislikes, his enthusiasms and his hesitations, his generosity and his fears. I keep him more or less under control. He, on the contrary, knows almost nothing about me. He has a few vague clues: a letter, a few witnesses, confused or reticent, a note that doesn't say much at all: signs, fragments which he laboriously tries to piece together."

"But who are you?" asked Christine. "In the book I mean."

"That's not revealed," I answered. "I am someone who doesn't want to be found, so it's not part of the game to say who."

"And the person looking for you . . . why is he looking for you with such determination?"

"Who knows?" I said. "It's hard to tell, I don't even know that and I'm writing the book. Perhaps he's looking for a past, an answer to something. Perhaps he would

like to grasp something that escaped him in the past. In a way, he is looking for himself, looking for me: that often happens in books, it's literature." (IN 82–83)³⁵

With ironic self-consciousness the narrator reveals that the novel he is summarizing is nothing other than the story that we are reading. In his synopsis, however, Roux turns into Mr. Nightingale—the narrator into his mysterious alter ego. Not only are identities fluid and interchangeable, but so are the two characters' functions (in Propp's sense of the term): the detective and the runaway, the novelist and the academic, and, to follow Poe's terminology, the creative and the resolvent individual. In their reciprocal substitutions (Roux who becomes Mr. Nightingale and vice versa) one can recognize the "double" Poe, the author of *The Raven* and of "The Philosophy of Composition," and, of course, also Tabucchi the novelist and Tabucchi the academic. If, according to Poe, the successful dynamic of the detective novel depends on the organic interaction, in the detective's mind, of creative and resolvent elements (the "double" Mr. Dupin), for Tabucchi the novel is not born of organic fusion but of hybrid paradoxes.

Resisting the *Sense of an Ending*: The Quest as Process

Identical yet different, reversible yet discrete, analogous yet opposite, Mr. Nightingale and Roux intercept and recognize each other during the novella's climactic looking-glass scene at the magnificently theatrical restaurant of the Hotel Oberoi, yet they decide not to communicate. If in the logic of the detective novel this choice is absurd, in that of the quest it is perhaps less bizarre. In Tabucchi's postmodern universe, the creative and the resolvent functions do not combine in abstract unities but create shifting and transient relationships; reflect fragmentary, nomadic, and schizoid identities; and tell anticlimactic and open-ended narratives. But it is exactly through these broken relationships and unfinished quests that it is possible to create "fragments" of stories: in these territories the heterogeneous space of the postmodern novel is born.

In Goa Tabucchi's allegory of the artistic creation both repeats and subverts Gozzano's elegiac renunciations by coming to terms with the ethical responsibilities of art. Christine (another mirror image) in the novel is both author and interpreter of a volume of photographs entitled *South Africa: Méfiez-vous des morceaux choisis* ("South Africa: Beware of Selected Bits"). Christine explains that her book starts with what she considers her best photograph:

It was a blow-up of a detail: the photo showed a young negro, just his head and shoulders, a sports singlet with a sales slogan, an athletic body, and expression of great effort on his face, his arms raised as in victory; obviously he's breasting the tape, in the hundred meters, for example. (IN 81)³⁶

The next picture presents a full shot of the same man and reveals more details:

On the left there's a policeman dressed like a Martian, a plexiglass helmet over his face, high boots, a rifle tucked into his shoulder, his eyes fierce under his fierce visor. He's shooting at the negro. And the negro is running away with his arms up, but he is already dead. (IN 81)³⁷

Christine's volume shows that relativistic visions of fragmentary details and multiple perspectives have replaced the master narratives of the past with their ambition to capture the whole of history. The volume also suggests that, if the formulas that allow us to give shape to the world in which we live turn out to be ambiguous, and if the classical analogy between truth and beauty becomes untenable, we are not to isolate ourselves in a world of solipsistic renunciation, incommunicability, and silence. An artist's responsibility consists in foregrounding the compositional structures (aesthetic paradigms, interpretative choices, and ideological trajectories) that give aesthetic shape to historical reality. These compositional structures both repeat and modify the familiar forms that define the hypertexts of a shared aesthetic tradition. In migrating through time and space, these forms adapt to changing cultural contexts and are refunctioned to respond to the differing ideological concerns of changing and inquisitive audiences.

In its self-reflective and intertextual itinerary Tabucchi's narrative does not offer univocal answers, nor does it provide the consolation of teleological closure. In a cinematic analogy it has been argued that *Notturmo indiano* ends with a dissolve on the "*terrain vague*" that evokes more queries than certainties, more hypotheses than "strong evaluations."³⁸ By giving up the opportunity of experiencing the concrete encounter that nurtured his quest, the protagonist of *Nocturne indien* neither renounces hermeneutical contact nor accepts the belief that "the feature of contemporary narrative . . . is to reflect a lack of understanding."³⁹ On the contrary, Tabucchi claims that life is only comprehensible in terms of narrative.⁴⁰ However, *Notturmo indiano* tests and questions the validity of conventional criteria of narrative understanding based solely on causal progression and teleological becoming.⁴¹ *Notturmo indiano* carves a

narrative space where what Tabucchi calls the rectilinear flow of “Aristotelian-Cartesian thought” is blocked by “marshes, unknown offshoots [forks, branches] and disquieting criteria to interpret the relationship with oneself and with others.”⁴² This is a domain peopled by Nietzschean doubles: an in-between where self and other, assertion and negation, presence and absence come together in hybrid and complex interactions.⁴³

By interrogating, adapting, and distorting “the traditional categories for the comprehension of the world” (Meschini 359) and by presenting a diegesis full of detours and holes, and a plot that avoids its own ending, *Notturmo indiano* is, in Tabucchi’s words, a “non-book. It is a book that avoids resolution . . . [by continuing] to ask questions.”⁴⁴ To indulge in the art of Tabucchian paradox, one can argue that this nonbook, which mocks the tradition of grand narratives, is a patchwork made of fragments from many other books, a text “saturated” with echoes from other texts (Ravazzoli 34). A montage of voices, episodes, and registers, *Notturmo indiano* also engages in dialogues with non-literary expressions such as photography, theater, and the cinema in an interrogation of the value and limits of narrative understanding that spans genres and media. The goal of Tabucchi’s quest for meaning, just like that of the quest for Xavier/Rossignol, occurs in the self-conscious analysis of narrative (diegesis) as hermeneutical *process*, not mere outcome. As Maurice Blanchot—one of the prime intertextual presences in *Notturmo indiano*—famously stated: “literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question” (“Literature” 300).

“A Cinema of Quotations”

Nocturne indien; or, How Alain Corneau
Filmed Antonio Tabucchi’s “Night”

Some books have pictures and some pictures have books.

—R. B. KITAJ, “ON ASSOCIATING TEXTS WITH PAINTINGS”

One of the first close-ups in Alain Corneau’s *Nocturne indien* (1989) focuses on a map in the Lonely Planet travel guide that the protagonist consults during a taxi ride in Bombay. Corneau’s shot faithfully translates a passage in Tabucchi’s *Notturmo indiano*: “I didn’t know Bombay, but I was trying to follow our route on a map on my knees” (IN 4).¹ Perhaps inspired by Corneau himself, who modestly defined his adaptation as a mere “passage au cinéma,” critics agree that, in *Nocturne indien*, Corneau transposed Tabucchi’s dialogue from the page to the screen and took advantage of the kinesthetic quality of Tabucchi’s prose.² If, however, Corneau profited from Tabucchi’s exquisitely “adaptogenic” or “cinemorphic” novel, he also interpreted and altered the novel in significant ways.³ Aware of Tabucchi’s generic parodies, Corneau used similar strategies in a medium-specific context with his ironic allusions to, and subversions of, the conventions of film noir. Moreover, Corneau peppered his film with literary references that differ from those in *Notturmo indiano*. While, as we have seen, in Tabucchi’s novel the most pervasive intertextual presences are those of Guido Gozzano and Edgar Allan Poe, Corneau’s use of Adelbert von Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemihl* constitutes an original adaptation of

the nineteenth-century story about a man who “lost” his shadow, as well as of Tabucchi’s own reading of this novella in “I treni che vanno a Madras,” a short story included in the collection *Piccoli equivoci senza importanza* (*Little Misunderstandings of No Importance*).

An eminently “cinematic” novel, *Notturmo indiano* inspired a “writerly” film, and, together, they provide an original study of the dialogic encounters between literature and cinema in postmodernity’s hybrid and discontinuous landscapes.⁴ At the same time, however, Corneau defined a space of cinematic autonomy from Tabucchi’s novel by staging a film-director rather than a novelist as his protagonist. Corneau thus expanded Tabucchi’s metaliterary investigations to include his self-conscious analysis of film’s ability to capture the nocturnal spaces of multiple identities and shifting personal boundaries. Besides reproducing the mirror games that mark the relationship between Tabucchi the writer and his first-person protagonist in *Notturmo indiano*, Corneau’s choice of a main character who is a film director underscores his own artistic sensibility. It introduces the idea of an “authorship” at the second degree, which takes shape in the transition between two different yet complementary professional identities and medium-specific proficiencies. Furthermore, in *Nocturne indien* Corneau demonstrates that the migration from fiction to film is not a linear process. As we have seen, adaptation is a process that involves multiple hermeneutical voices and occurs across different semiotic spaces. Franz Schubert’s melancholy adagio from his String Quintet in C Major (D956) and David Hockney’s series of swimming pool paintings constitute, as we will see, powerful presences that greatly enrich the adaptive process in *Nocturne indien*.

Textual Ellipses and Their Cinematic Adaptation: The Ethics of the Aesthetic

Borrowing Edward Said’s adaptation of musical terminology to literary analysis, I suggest that Corneau engages in a “contrapuntal reading” of Tabucchi’s *Notturmo indiano*. “In the counterpoint of Western classical music,” Said explains, “various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one” (*Culture* 51). While echoing Tabucchi’s themes, Corneau creates an adaptation that does not limit itself to mere note-against-note parallelism. “If one person sings the same as the other,” an

early theoretician of choral counterpoint argued, "that does not fulfill the aim of *contrapunctus*, for its aim is that what the one sings be different from what the other sings" (Sachs). Similarly, present-day theorists distinguish between polyphony, as "the combining of equal voices," and counterpoint, as the "type of writing in which the voices are brought into relief against each other functionally and by virtue of their relative importance" (Dahlhaus). Corneau often draws out and amplifies what is only hinted at or left unsaid in *Notturmo indiano*, and at other times he tones down or expunges what Tabucchi chose to emphasize instead. Novel and film demonstrate how their narratives intertwine and overlap at the same time in which they differ and swerve away from each other. They alternatively isolate multiple voices, varying themes, and different points of view regarding shared hermeneutical and ethical issues. They add density and complexity to what Gadamer calls the dialogic "process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point" that marks the interpretive journey (*Truth* 368).⁵ Together, novel and film generate a contrapuntal interplay based on the deployment of consonances and dissonances and on the combination and juxtaposition of voices organized according to the skilled intermediality that is the signature trait of Corneau's adaptive process.

Corneau repeats and transforms Tabucchi's references to the detective novel by playing with the conventions of the genre to which he owes his fame, the film noir. The author of *Police Python 357*, *La menace*, *Série noire*, and *Le choix des armes* argued that *Notturmo indiano* gave him the opportunity to question the conventions of a genre with which he believed he was becoming too mechanically associated. There are no guns, no tough guys, no explicit violence, no blood, and no climactic denouement in *Nocturne indien*. There is, however, a sense of suspense and mystery, of unknown and impending danger (fig. 6.1). Spaces are either dark and confining or cavernous and dwarfing for Corneau's protagonist, whom he calls Rossignol. While Corneau thus pays lip service to some of the clichés of film noir, the features that he is most interested in are those that he describes in his introduction to a volume entitled *Le film noir américain*: "The 'noir-thriller' is . . . the abyss, the hole without bottom, the night where all the cats are gray, where all is possible. . . . In front of all certainties, affirmations, positive definitions, happy conclusions, and all other reassuring categories of identification, the thriller lays in wait, and openly attacks or corrupts in the darkness. Changes of identity, doublings,



Figure 6.1. Dark and ominous shadows mark all Indian interiors, such as the hotel room where the protagonist meets Vimala. Photo courtesy of Christian Bourgois Productions/Photofest.

losses of self, brutal reversals, and ‘dangerous grounds’ (Nicholas Ray), sly or violent vertigo, there is enough to make all other films sick, even when they try to maintain their sanity through ‘bourgeois’ and well regulated habits.”⁶

Corneau’s interest in the ambiguities of individuality and self-definition (“changes of identity, doublings, losses of self, brutal reversals”) is especially clear in Rossignol’s trip to Elephanta, where he visits the famous caves. The seminal importance of this scene cannot be missed, as it fills one of Tabucchi’s narrative ellipses. Furthermore, the rock-cut temple of Elephanta is the only monument belonging to Indian culture that Corneau includes in his film (Garel 18). Corneau captures Rossignol’s crossing to Elephanta with four consecutive fixed shots: the first is of the boat’s hull, the second of an elderly Indian couple on the boat, the third of the flight of stairs leading to the temple, and the fourth of the temple’s entrance. These shots repeat exactly the four shots that Corneau uses to illustrate Vimala’s narrative of the trips she used to take with Xavier to Elephanta (“he wanted to see the three-headed Shiva again and again”). In what thus functions as a “reenactment” of his

alter ego's journey, Rossignol's solitary ascension to the temple leads to the apparition of the three-headed Shiva out of the cave's darkened interior, "as if emerging from the subconscious' embrace."⁷

If, in the rest of the film, Corneau had instructed Jean Hugues Andrade (playing Rossignol) to underact as much as possible, and to maintain a restrained, neutral appearance by limiting facial expression and avoiding hand gestures and body language, here his emotions are all on the surface, and blatantly powerful.⁸ The sequence of cuts from Rossignol to Shiva, and back, juxtaposes the enigmatic face and sealed eyelids of the colossal Trimurti with the emotional landscape displayed by Rossignol's countenance (figs. 6.2 and 6.3). Corneau's climaxing cut to a close-up of Rossignol's tearful eyes formally conveys the sense of a momentous personal revelation—the discovery, we can guess, of the coexistence of contradictory traits that is associated with the an-



Figure 6.2. The Trimurti (the Hindu trinity of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma), c. seventh or eighth century. Sandstone. Shiva Temple, Elephanta, Maharashtra, India. Werner Forman / Art Resource, New York. Used by permission.



Figure 6.3. An uncommonly moved Rossignol stares at Shiva.

drogynous Shiva—destroyer, preserver, and creator at once. It is here, in front of the three-headed Shiva, that the Western self must come to terms with the estranging multiplicity of the Indian divinity. As Garel observes:

For the protagonist, the visit to this statue corresponds to a crossing of the mirror. Up to this point, he was in India without being really there. Bombay, in spite of being Asian up to its smallest corners, is the most Western city in India. Bombay is the door to India, as is symbolized by the monument The Gateway of India, which is placed almost at the tip of the island of Bombay, where one boards the boats to Elephanta island. Up to that point, Rossignol prompted the encounters he made, and these encounters were rational, and proceeded according to a logical movement. Up to that point, his action had a goal and was therefore oriented toward the future; it also had a foundation point: it was rooted in and resulted from the past, from memory.⁹

With the image of the crossing of the mirror, Garel implies that Rossignol repeats (and thus becomes) Xavier, and, more broadly, that the Western subject “gives himself up” to India—where India stands for the nocturnal, pre-logical or alogical otherness and hybrid multiplicity that defeats the rational

codes of the Cartesian ego. "Having left to look for a friend who got lost in India, . . . he too gets lost in turn."¹⁰

In a film based on the protagonist's repeated efforts to seal himself off from the overwhelming and teeming reality of India, such voluntaristic crossing of the mirror—such willed loss of self—appears improbable.¹¹ Moreover, Corneau repeatedly pointed out that, in his view, no Western interpreter could embrace the otherness of India directly but could only experience it through the interpretive (and self-conscious) mediation of familiar codes—what Gadamer called one's enabling prejudices or prejudgments. "[*Nocturne indien*]" is a very European film," Corneau states in an interview with Jean Gili.¹² In the conversation included in the Studio Canal DVD's supplementary materials, Corneau explains, more explicitly, that "the only way [for a European] to speak about India is through the eyes of the West."¹³

The slow-motion track that follows Rossignol up the steps and inside the cave keeps pace with the measured musical rhythm of Schubert's String Quintet in C Major. The utter lack of words for the entire lengthy sequence emphasizes that the silent, cryptic exchange between Rossignol and Shiva is mediated by a third, musically eloquent Western party. Schubert's plaintive and funereal adagio is, with few exceptions, the musical background for Rossignol's entire Indian pilgrimage. During the Elephanta scene, however, it is more than a mere accompaniment. Here, music takes the upper hand. To a Western audience the familiar nineteenth-century movement, with its wistful melancholia, translates Rossignol's emotions into musical intensity and, by contrast, emphasizes the inscrutable remoteness of the Hindu God.

Given the title of Tabucchi's novel, Corneau's choice of Schubert's adagio is less predictable, perhaps, than a nocturne by John Field, Frederick Chopin, Franz Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn, or Claude Debussy would have been.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, both Schubert's movement and the genre of the nocturne express meditative moods and subjective emotions.¹⁵ But more than other classical nocturnes, Schubert's evokes the theme of the self's relationship to Time, and, more specifically, to the passing and ending of Time. With its slow development and repetitive melody, the adagio suggests the sensation of time slowing down, almost at the brink of being suspended. This mode of quasi stillness disrupts the experience of linear time—of time as becoming.

In his adagio Schubert resolutely, if temporarily, sets the notions of origins and endings into musical parentheses, as the teleological impulse softens and lingers on the threshold of an expansive and monumental temporality. One

can think of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizomatic *milieu* as the *middle* or *location* that has no beginning and end but rather constitutes "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culminating point or external end" (*A Thousand* 22). This milieu introduces "another way of traveling and moving: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing" (*A Thousand* 25). One can also think of the Gadamerian *in-between* as the milieu where questions and answers encounter each other and engage in the to-and-fro movement that Gadamer links to the "mode of being of play"—a mode of being that has no "goal or purpose" but that has the potential to usher hermeneutical discovery and transformation (*Truth* 105).

If the Trimurti's visual polyvalence appears to have already neutralized all binary opposites (self and other but also beginning and end, life and death), Schubert's adagio tells a more complex story. Lawrence Kramer describes Schubert's aesthetic experience as the attempt to defeat the dependence on the progressive temporality that *nevertheless* rules our biological existence and defines our physical sense of self (*Franz Schubert* 154–55). Corneau's slow-motion tracking shot, which follows Rossignol up the steps to Shiva's cave (a *unicum* in a film that favors fixed shots) functions as the visual counterpoint to Schubert's adagio, in its simultaneous engagement of the principle of temporal deferment (with its sense of extended *durée*) and the image of inevitable, if delayed, progress forward.¹⁶

Contextualized in its proper milieu, Schubert's Quintet evokes the myth of the romantic self and the pain that all (pseudo)unitary subjectivities endure when facing Death, the ultimate dissolution of Being.¹⁷ As is well known, the String Quintet was composed two months before Schubert's premature death, at the age of thirty-one, in the fall of 1828. Published posthumously, the piece enjoyed continued success, and commentaries on the adagio remark on its touching and wistful mood, often quoting Thomas Mann's stated wish that he may die listening to this music, and pianist Arthur Rubinstein's desire to have the adagio played at his funeral.¹⁸ In *Nocturne indien* Indian images and Western sounds collaborate to evoke the mood of this scene, but this mood is mixed as it describes the contrapuntal existence of two different stages in the approach to subjectivity. One, expressed by Shiva, is transformative and circular and has already "overthrow[n] ontology, do[ne] away with foundations, nullif[ied] endings and beginnings" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand* 25). The other is still wrestling with and attempting to overcome, if only for

the wistful duration of a musical piece, the limitations of linear and unitary thought and the strictures of binary opposites such as self and other, being and nonbeing, birth and death. And the pathos of this attempt results from the fact that it takes place within the immanent framework that these epistemological limitations and ontological strictures have created: not from "the other side of the mirror" but in a hybrid and pregnant *in-between*.

Though, throughout his novel, Tabucchi plays with this uncanny multiplicity of being, together with the disruption of the boundaries between objective and subjective realms, he rarely engages the ethical dimensions of these ontological breaches. This is precisely what Corneau accomplishes by filling in yet another of Tabucchi's narrative ellipses: the protagonist's train trip to Madras. Corneau recontextualizes and adapts Tabucchi's "I treni che vanno a Madras" ("The Trains to Madras"), a story about a man (Rossignol, in the movie) who, on a train from Bombay to Madras, meets a fellow European traveler, an elderly gentleman who speaks English with a distinct German accent. An expert on Dravidian art, in his seventies, the man entertains Rossignol with his erudite descriptions of the complex designs of the temples in Madras:

"If you visit all those Dravidian temples around Madras, it may interest you to know that they were built according to very specific rules. Square layouts divided into sixty-four or eighty-one squares, like a checkerboard. But each of these squares corresponds to a specific God. In Hinduism, God has thousands of appearances, has even millions, and every one of these appearances is again a number of sometimes quite contradictory identities. Shiva for instance is the creator but is also the God of destruction or he may be quite another God. . . . You see, we are very far from European ideas of clearly defined individuality. The temples of Madras are talking to us. Listen to them."

We could read these words as the eloquent exegesis of Rossignol's encounter with the Trimurti at Elephanta. But the following events complicate this interpretation. Two guards interrupt the conversation for a passport check, which reveals that the man is an Israeli national by the name of Peter Schlemihl. In the novella, as well as in the film, the protagonist, who obviously still subscribes to the belief of unitary and solidly referential identities, is quick to point out that Peter Schlemihl cannot be the man's real name: "There's only one Peter Schlemihl," he protests. "It's a writer's invention. Adelbert von Chamisso created him in the middle of the last century. It's in *The Marvelous*

Adventures of Peter Schlemihl." The elderly man ignores Rossignol and proceeds to narrate why he embarked on his journey:

"I'm going [to Madras] to see a statue. . . . A long time ago, in Germany, I met a doctor. He conducted surgical experiments for German science. For that purpose he had a couple of armed guards with him. We were all naked, waiting in a line. Before the operation, the doctor asked us questions about our virility, about our sexuality. When the turn was on me, my eye was caught by a small statue, on his desk: an Oriental divinity dancing with its arms and legs in a circle. The Doctor caught me looking at it and explained, smiling. You know German? Well, these were his very words: 'Diese Statue stellt den Kreis des Lebens dar, durch den der ganze Abfall, der ganze Dreck, alles Minderwertige und Krankhafte hindurch muss, um zu einer höheren Lebenssphäre zu gelangen—zur Schönheit. Ich hoffe, dass auch Sie in einem späteren Leben als Wiedergeborener zur Rasse der Herren gehören werden.' . . . It was the dancing figure of Shiva [fig. 6.4] called Nataraja, the one in Madras. . . . As you can see, I haven't as yet been biologically recycled and my interpretation of the statue is quite different from that of the doctor. I thought about it every day for all those years. Forty-five years. . . . It's the only thing I thought about for forty-five years. . . . I am quite sure now that that statue does not represent the circle of life through which we have to go to be reborn but just the dance of life. As simple as that. . . . Life is a circle, but in another way. One day the circle closes. We just don't know when."¹⁹

Once they reach the Madras train station, Rossignol and the elderly man part ways, never to meet again. A few days later (four, in the novella) Rossignol finds out that a man, an elderly Argentinean national, has been murdered in mysterious circumstances, the only piece of evidence being a statuette of Shiva-Nataraja that the killer left near the body. An expert of Dravidian art, in his seventies, the victim was an ex-doctor of German origin. In Tabucchi's narrative it is clear that the man on the train and the German doctor are two different individuals, as the narrator sees a photograph of the murdered man in a local paper: "the newspaper mentioned some cataloguing services that the victim provided to the local museum and printed the photograph of an unknown man: the face of a bald old man, with clear eyes and a thin mouth."²⁰ The film, instead, maintains a substantial ambiguity as Corneau shows no photographic evidence of the victim. He rather has Rossignol hear the news of the murder from a local radio station. By developing the uncanny analogies between the killer and the victim, Corneau complicates the simple interpre-



Figure 6.4. Shiva Nataraja as Lord of the Dance, tenth century. Bronze, 67.3 cm × 48.3 cm × 17 cm. Madras, India. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain. V&A Images, London / Art Resource, New York. Used by permission.

tation that the “shadow” Schlemihl is after is nothing other than his former persecutor. Ultimately, Corneau leaves us with a number of unanswered questions: Who is Peter Schlemihl? A fiction and impostor? A Holocaust survivor or a Nazi criminal? Did the original victim turn into a cold-blooded killer? Can he possibly be all of these things at once? Is this a story of survival or one of revenge? Both?

Disturbing as they are, these questions invite us to account for the episode’s

multiple interpretations and, implicitly, caution us that the commitment to choose among different interpretative options constitutes the margin of freedom but also the measure of ethical involvement that is expected of engaged readers and viewers. Interpretation, in turn, does not start with the acts of reading and viewing but is encrypted within the literary text and embedded in this text's transition into cinematic form. These interpretative games and their mises en abyme emphasize the changing subject positions and "horizons of understanding" that share the creative and interpretative acts.

Corneau's episode features a "Peter Schlemihl" who, unlike the protagonist of Tabucchi's "I treni che vanno a Madras," provides a unique reading of Chamisso's novella, a reading based on a "misunderstanding" of no little importance indeed:

SCHLEMIHL. You've read *The Marvelous Adventures of Peter Schlemihl*?

ROSSIGNOL. Yes, and Peter Schlemihl loses his shadow.

SCHLEMIHL. And will end up finding it again.

But in Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* Peter never actually finds his shadow. The novella starts with a young Peter who barter his shadow to the devil in exchange for unlimited riches—a business deal that the devil sees as the preliminary step for his future acquisition of Peter's soul. With his shadow Peter is an independent, self-sufficient, and "whole" individual. Without a shadow he becomes an outcast, a dimidiated man, different from everybody else. Shunning the sunshine, he lives at night and in darkness, lest people realize what is perceived as an unmentionable curse, his "sinister secret"—a secret so awful as to constitute an original sin of the second degree (Chamisso 16). In spite of the hardships of his solitary, albeit fantastically wealthy, existence and his desire to regain his shadow, Peter never gets it back because he consistently refuses the devil's second barter: his soul for his shadow. Though never whole again, Peter's choice to reject the devil's proposal opens a narrative of expiation and redemption, as he becomes a philanthropist, an explorer, and a renowned natural scientist. An allegory of the Fall from a state of wholeness and grace to one of divisiveness and fragmentation, Schlemihl's is also a story of moral responsibility and reparation based on the learned ability to choose relative right from relative wrong in an imperfect and mixed world.²¹

Like his nineteenth-century namesake, Corneau's Schlemihl is a learned man and a scholar, trained in the interpretation of arcane art objects. Yet he blatantly misreads Chamisso's novella by imposing on it a meaning that was

never part of the original text. By revising the story of his namesake, Schlemihl rewrites his own character as well. His journey to Madras is also a quest to find his "shadow" and to overcome the sense of alienation that he shares not only with the character of Peter Schlemihl but with Chamisso as well:

SCHLEMIHL. You know what Chamisso wrote about himself?

ROSSIGNOL. No, I don't. It's the only book of his I know.

SCHLEMIHL. I am a Frenchman in Germany, a German in France, a Catholic among the Protestants, and a Protestant among the Catholics. I'm a stranger wherever I go.

As a Jew playing the role of Chamisso's character, Corneau's Schlemihl adds another dimension to his nineteenth-century predecessor's sense of alienation by placing him in the position of the stereotyped *ebreo errante* ("Wandering Jew")—the scapegoat and victim of a biblical curse placed on him for an unmentionable sin.²² Corneau's Schlemihl may thus be seen as offering a quite conventional (in the sense of Gentile-inspired) reading of Chamisso's parable as allegory for the Jewish Diaspora. But by doing so, Schlemihl also defines himself as a revisionary interpreter of Gentile mythologies. Specifically, Schlemihl's journey from Israel to Madras constitutes a powerful appropriation and reversal of the Aryan myth. Schlemihl thus creates an effective counterpoint to the discussion of the myth of origins that permeates both novel and film.

As Leon Poliakov argued in *Le mythe arien*, the ideologues of the Aryan myth rediscovered a unitary and original self in India, and from this quest for origins they retrospectively built a glorious genealogy, a dream of supremacy, and a "rival society to that of the Hebrew" (Poliakov 185). Origins and "race" became synonyms in the Aryan myth, their *trait d'union* being, of course, the purity of both. In what the surgeon Robert Knox defined as "transcendental anatomy" (Poliakov 232), human ontology was systematized by race, as race defined the physical traits that controlled intellectual skills and moral features, which were therefore seen as "rooted in the body" (Poliakov 241). Even when the relation between the physical and the moral was approached from the side of the moral, as in the case of German idealism, the invisible (thought) was called on to explain the visible (matter). The differences in physical development were seen as manifestations of spiritual differences and vice versa. In its physiological or metaphysical determinism, and in both individual and collective forms, identity was absolute, normative, and stable.

In his journey to Madras, Schlemihl destroys all absolutizing values and underscores his belief that all individual identities are fleeting and multiple and that the self is ambivalent and changeable, unfettered from any absolute point of origin. Interestingly, Corneau's train trip episode ends with a voice-over reciting, in English, a passage from Victor Hugo's *Les travailleurs de la mer*: "The human body can perhaps only be an appearance. It conceals our reality. It casts a veil upon our lightened shadow."²³ In a significant reversal, identity defines itself as devoid of material solidity and physical concreteness, the "lightened shadow" being that insubstantial sense of self that the materialistic and empirical West has lost. "The common error," Hugo writes, "is to mistake the outward self for the real self."²⁴ But if for Hugo "reality is the Soul,"²⁵ in Tabucchi and Corneau the very belief in the notion of essence, be it immanent or transcendental, individual or collective, is radically questioned, which arouses the fear, more Pirandellian than Hugoesque, that behind the mask one will find either another mask or nothing at all.

Ultimately, for Corneau's Schlemihl, "finding one's shadow" means the opposite of what Chamisso originally intended. In its multiple valences Corneau's shifting shadow reflects the self's ambivalent multiplicity—its hybrid doubleness/duplicity—rather than celebrating its wholeness and integrity. Discussing his adaptation of Tabucchi's novel, Corneau argued that he had originally thought of offering the lead role to a nonactor, a writer for example, to reproduce some of Tabucchi's metatextual games. "But I would have made a huge mistake," he continues. "I needed someone who plays a role, who fills the characters with his own ambiguities. After all, this is a movie about actors. Because the actor with his constant changes is precisely the central theme of this film."²⁶ If Corneau thus demonstrates that he is a perceptive interpreter of Tabucchi's intertextual dialogues, by including a Jewish character in his cast, he also adds a further level of complexity to his interlocutor's philosophical queries.

Why would a man belonging to a collective history marked by the Diaspora, and who has survived the Holocaust while being a victim of Nazi eugenics programs, subscribe to such a diffuse notion of being? Doesn't the dissolution of identity that the Madras-bound Schlemihl appear to advocate hollow-out all correlate notions of origin, ethnic belonging, and right-to-homeland? Aren't these notions unrenounceable givens in the arena of the *Jewish* experience, since this experience is "identified with persecution, survival, migration, adaptation, the formation of Israel, the encounter with

the biblical landscape and the rebirth of an ancient language"? (Steyn 7–8).²⁷ Although we may be tempted to consider the last two questions as rhetorical, we ought to consider that an affirmative answer implies accepting the existence of a unique and pure Jewish identity. From this standpoint "the Jew is assumed to be already there, ceaselessly *a priori*" because "the subject is identical with identity" (Steyn 9).²⁸ Given the context of *Nocturne indien*, it is reasonable to suspect that this was hardly what Corneau had in mind when he included the character of Schlemihl in his adaptation of Tabucchi's narrative. Corneau, indeed, tests Tabucchi's playful estrangement of the notion of the single unitary subject that founds much of Western philosophical thought against "the Jewish experience."

By refusing to identify with the advocates of Jewish essentialism, Corneau does not "undo" the Jewish self or deny the "quintessential common core" that defines Jewish identity (Herman 81). He rather provides a framework to think about Jewish identity (and identity politics) in a nonnormative way as something specific yet changeable, definable yet transformative, historically grounded yet developing: in sum to think about identity as a *diverse singularity*, which is best defined in a historical and comparative perspective.²⁹ Corneau is also aware that in the realm of representation all identity (Jewish or not) "is made, undone, and made again" in numberless discourses and semiotic practices, such as those of the law and social policy, of literary culture, history, theater, and film (Steyn 7).³⁰ Each of these discourses represents Jewish identity within specific disciplinary boundaries and ideological contexts, and each negotiates this identity in the *relational* spaces created in the intersections with other discourses and the exchanges with other identities.

In a September 1989 interview with Jean A. Gili, Corneau emphasized the significance of the Schlemihl episode by arguing that it was emblematic of the entire film: "[Schlemihl's] destiny, . . . with its loss of identity caused by Nazism and this kind of redefinition of identity because of Nazism, could also be one of the explanations for the entire film. I often associate the character played by Jean-Hugues Anglade to the way of being that Schlemihl embodies. . . . He, Schlemihl, like Rossignol, is in a situation of displacement."³¹ The uncanny mirror games that engage all the characters of *Nocturne indien* invite us to examine how both identity and difference can be repeatedly displaced, problematized, and reconfigured. If, however, like Rossignol in India, Schlemihl takes part in a process that questions all stable "assumptions of identity" and rejects conventional Western notions of the absolute and uni-

tary self, his experience is also remarkably different from Rossignol's. Unlike Rossignol's, Schlemihl's ontological displacement is not only wished for as a positively estranging and heuristically constructive event but is also imposed upon, as the tragic result of the Nazi plan to annihilate the Jewish people's collective identity. In our context the similarities between Rossignol and Schlemihl arise out of this single *difference*, the importance of which we cannot overlook.³² This difference resolutely carves the ethical boundaries of Corneau's relativism and provides a clear framework to his philosophy of indeterminacy, fragmentation, and plurality.

Arguably, with his dissimulations and astute misreadings, Corneau's Schlemihl is an unresolved and ultimately unreliable character. While, with a nudge to the conventions of film noir, Corneau never clears Schlemihl of the suspicion that he may be the murderer of the German physician, the filmmaker also hints at a "marvelous" reading of the episode based on uncanny doublings and mysterious symmetries.³³ In the context of the fantastic and marvelous genres, Schlemihl appears both as victim and perpetrator, a modern Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and a representative of the doppelgänger narrative and musical tradition that inspires Tabucchi's entire novella.³⁴ But what is a perfectly legitimate reading in this generic tradition would be an aberration in a historical framework: simply put, how likely would it be for anybody to be a Jewish concentration camp survivor and a former Nazi camp physician at the same time? Moreover, Schlemihl's pained narrative of the eugenics experiments that were performed on his body reveals that he is indeed a diminished man but in a concrete and biological sense and not in the *marvelous* and metaphysical context of his shadowless nineteenth-century predecessor.³⁵ A victim of Nazi experimental medicine, with its programs of compulsory sterilization, Schlemihl's missing shadow is not only the simulacrum of an original and mourned totality but also, and especially, the objective correlative of the biological future that the Nazis denied to him.

With the character of Schlemihl, particularly in his relationship of similarity and difference with Rossignol, Corneau challenges definitions of the "post-modern condition" as a "state of such vertiginous instability that all the traditional distinctions of philosophy, ethics, and social and political theory are imploded" (Best and Kellner 121). Unlike Baudrillard, for example, Corneau subscribes to the belief that differential notions, including ontological and ethical ones, have not been completely sucked into a black hole. And unlike

Deleuze and Guattari (whom I have otherwise invoked extensively in this chapter), Corneau would resolutely disagree with the statement that "good and bad are only the products of [a] . . . temporary selection" (*A Thousand* 10). Dependent on active processes of interpretation, evaluation, and choice, these notions may be open to revision, yet they exist in a framework that challenges the "everything goes" attitude of absolute relativism, thus inspiring conversations about "what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now" (Gadamer, *Truth* xxxviii).

In spite of its maddening complexity the Madras section tells us that not all cats are gray, that the ability to sift among multiple interpretations and ultimately make informed hermeneutical and ethical choices is the skill that the plunge into absolute relativism may inevitably impair. Corneau thus highlights one of the epistemological cruxes of Tabucchi's novel and suggests that the rejection of all forms of absolutizing and normative thought does not necessarily imply a choice of sterile subjectivism and unengaged relativism. Corneau understands very well that it is the novel's metatextual awareness that gives his protagonist's quest an allegorical dimension in a self-consciously aesthetic context. The postmodern allegory that *Nocturne indien* borrows and adapts from *Notturmo indiano* defends and confirms the ethical and epistemological values of art in the contemporary world.

Narcissistic Novels and Their Cinematic Mirrors: A Novelist Turns Cinéaste

By making his protagonist a filmmaker, Corneau not only changes the expressive medium but also comments on the process of cinematic adaptation. While the recognition scene between Rossignol and his doppelgänger in the film reproduces the dialogue of the novel almost verbatim, Corneau does not reduce adaptation to dogged fidelity to the original text. On the contrary, he draws attention to the strategies of representation that are peculiar to film. In a deviation from Tabucchi's text, when Christine asks Rossignol to tell her how the film ends, he replies: "Really, if you want to know how the movie ends, I must show it to you here on location, I can't simply tell it to you."³⁶ As Rossignol and Christine move to a table near the hotel's swimming pool, the background slowly turns into an undifferentiated blur, a surface of abstract patterns and flickering lights, which the pool's water reflects and doubles. The

hotel's highly stylized scenario can be compared to a painterly surface, underscoring its technique rather than its contents. In a series of richly composed and masterfully framed shots and countershots, Corneau and his director of photography, Yves Angelo, shun all the trappings of realism and render Rossignol's uncanny encounter with his alter ego through a skillful combination of color filters and long lenses. The foreground, which is occupied by Christine and Rossignol, stays in sharp focus, but the background, where we imagine Rossignol's double is placed, remains indistinct and blurred. It is at this point that Rossignol engages Christine in a dialogue, which simultaneously interprets and acts out the interpreted scene:

"Here, let's suppose that it is going to be in this hotel, an evening like this evening, warm and fragrant, and I am having dinner with a pretty woman, someone like you for example. We are at this table here and then, at a certain point . . . I see him over there, at the table where we were ourselves just a moment ago. He too is with a woman. I see only the two of them. She reminds me of a woman, two women, even. He notes my position without moving. He looks happy and smiles at me."³⁷

By providing a verbal exegesis to his own film, Corneau gives descriptive concreteness to abstract forms, rather than following the more predictable path of having visual images endow words with referential solidity. Corneau favors a subjective camera here, and the world according to Roux (the world of his existential quest but also, one must remember, the world of the film that he is making) is a gauzy place of changing shapes, fuzzy images, and uncanny reflections.

Following conventional expectations, this should be the climaxing moment of the full revelation of the self to the other (and their reunification) or, in Alain Garel's interpretation, the scene that witnesses the transfer of the protagonist's personality, the last phase of the dissolution of his personality before he reaches the last stop and crosses the mirror."³⁸ I suggest, instead, that what we see here is the technology of moviemaking, with an explicit description of and implicit commentary on the ways in which the cinematic medium is translating a literary text and representing a subjective reality. In all its formal complexity and theatrical artificiality this scene symbolizes neither the subject's retrieved wholeness nor its ultimate dissolution. By foregrounding its uncanny strategies of representation, this scene underscores that the responsibility of interpretation falls on the "makers" of a world that "comes into

being" through the language of different media and on the viewers, through the hermeneutical use that they make of these media, in what I call a first-person commitment to engaged perspectivism.

Reclaiming the Critical Self; or, How to Judge a Script by Its Cover

Shockingly, if we think of the nocturnal tones of his India, Corneau argued in an interview that his adaptation of Tabucchi's novel occurred thanks to the mediation of a volume containing the famous series of David Hockney's swimming pool paintings. The cover of the film script that Corneau wrote with Louis Gardel presents a reproduction of Hockney's 1972 painting *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (fig. 6.5).

The painting depicts Peter Schlesinger, Hockney's partner and fellow art-



Figure 6.5. David Hockney, *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 84 in. × 120 in. Copyright David Hockney. Photo by Steve Sloman. Used by permission.



Figure 6.6. David Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 242.6 cm × 243.8 cm. Tate Gallery, London. Tate, London / Art Resource, New York. Used by permission.

ist, looking down into a swimming pool, where a swimmer appears eerily frozen in water that has a marblelike solidity—a hard reflectivity. Familiar and strange at the same time, the painting glosses the uncanny interplay of identity and difference that has interested us so far. I would suggest that *Portrait of an Artist* also evokes, albeit in absentia, another painting in the swimming pools series, perhaps the most famous of Hockney's swimming pool paintings, *A Bigger Splash* (1967) (fig. 6.6).

Seen contrapuntally, in the context of the film, *A Bigger Splash* is a picture of absence, simply framing the dissolution of identity. In an interview included in the extra materials in the DVD package of *Nocturne indien* Corneau implicitly touched on the reasons why such dissolution was not, for him, a viable aesthetic option. If the crisis of the absolute self creates *perspectivism*—the refraction and multiplication of meaning—it does not imply ontological void and hermeneutical renunciation. One should not give up the ambition to artistically “represent”—in fact construct—oneself, the world, or oneself *in* the world and thus abdicate all moral responsibility. It is precisely the potential for such an absence that the adaptation process exorcizes in *Nocturne indien*. In this way Corneau highlights, by counterpoint, the relevance of the character of Christine (another mirror image) in the novel. In Corneau’s film Rossignol’s dialogue with Christine occurs in French. If, throughout the movie, Rossignol moves freely among multiple linguistic competencies, speaking, or showing to understand, besides his native French, also English, Portuguese, and German (an interesting change from the novel, which is written entirely in Italian), here he reverts, culturally and linguistically, into what Corneau defines “un bon français,” insisting that Rossignol is “a good Frenchman . . . , a Parisian, a tourist who speaks French, in a vacation place.”³⁹ The couple’s debonair conversation on film and photography, over copious wine and exotic libations in a trendy tourist spot, could be seen as the kind of seductive foreplay that is signature French, in a most clichéd manner, if Corneau did not overturn trite expectations by having the characters wish each other goodnight and part ways once they reach the door of Christine’s hotel room.

But even leaving Corneau’s irony aside, what makes Rossignol a “bon Parisien” is hardly a conventional sense of ethnocentric absolutism or facile cultural stereotyping. Belonging to a historically more centralized and normative notion of collective identity than that of his Italian counterpart, Corneau offers an alternative definition of what being French means in the mixed spaces of our postmodern world. Within the context of the entire film, identity is both constructed and problematized through self-conscious acts of self-narration and (fictive) self-display. Especially if considered in the dialectics of the adaptive process, the artist’s identity is relational, intersubjective, dialogic, and plural. In the contexts of the modes and genres exploited both in the film and the novel (the mode of the quest and the genre of the detective story), selfhood is nomadic, multilingual, shifting, discontinuous, and changeable. But it is never completely lost. As Corneau noted in an interview with Jean-

Jacques Bernard, "Rossignol is the imagined portrait of today's traveler. He has a real gaze but keeps his own identity, perhaps simply because this identity is uncertain."⁴⁰

More eloquently than Tabucchi, Corneau argues that in any given moment in time, this errant and uncertain subjectivity that moves toward a goal only to ironically destabilize "the sense of an ending" (to quote Frank Kermode), is also *positioned* in relation to issues of gender, social class, cultural makeup, religious affiliation, ethnic belonging, and personal and collective history, among other things. The contrapuntal interplay of these seemingly mutually exclusive terms allows for that *perspectivist* and dialogic engagement with the world that guards against either prescriptive dogmatism or self-defeating nihilism. This perspectivism also founds the meta-aesthetic investigation of art as a hermeneutical tool—a way to not only build the self and represent the world but also to ethically implicate the self in the interpretation of this world. Corneau understands that the India he mediated and adapted from Tabucchi is a discursive space "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic* 294). It is an "India" already and inevitably in quotation marks. An honest (not faithful) adaptation, then, does not consist in merely remythologizing the world in another discourse. Rather, it implies revealing how and why this world was configured in a certain way, by incorporating disruptive points of view that estrange the ideological foundations and expose the concealed intentions of the configurative act.

This interpretive adaptive journey comes with the cautionary understanding that if "the visible without a frame is always something else" (Tabucchi, *IN* 5), it also leads to the empowering awareness that this otherness can only be rendered in discursive form—placed into quotation marks, so to speak.⁴¹ To paraphrase creatively one of Tabucchi's favorite literary interlocutors, Henry James, this awareness demonstrates that, if in *reality* relations stop nowhere, the task of the artist is to draw, carefully and self-consciously, the frame within which they *appear* to do so.⁴² The frame (the quotation marks) has a looking-glass doubleness: it is simultaneously open and closed. On the one hand, it configures the real and thus seals it off, closes "the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" within the boundaries of its own discursive form (Barthes, *S/Z* 5). On the other hand, it opens up its own space by explicitly repeating other voices and other contexts and by engaging with them in the transformative encounters that inspire all hermeneutical and adaptive journeys.⁴³

The Writer in the Looking Glass

Jorge Luis Borges's "Tema del traidor y del héroe" and the Ambivalences of the Uncanny

People should not leave looking glasses hanging in their rooms any more than they should leave open cheque books or letters confessing some hideous crime.

VIRGINIA WOOLF, "THE LADY IN THE LOOKING GLASS"

As a child, I felt before large mirrors [the] . . . horror of a spectral duplication or multiplication of reality. Their infallible and continuous functioning, their pursuit of my actions, their cosmic pantomime, were uncanny then, whenever it began to grow dark.

JORGE LUIS BORGES, "THE DRAPED MIRRORS"

With "Tema del traidor y del héroe" (1944) Borges furnishes an exemplary analysis of the complexities of narrative understanding. The short story stages the interpretive challenges occurring when the familiar syntagmatic and progressive plane of a linear plot coexists with its metaphoric and paradigmatic other—the plane of equivalence and repetition. Borges self-consciously creates a masterfully interconnected pattern where the teleological impulse of the whodunit comes to terms with a "construction in 'storeys' [in which] the horizontal concatenations of the narrative 'thread' [are projected] on to an implicitly vertical axis" (Barthes, *Image* 87). As Barthes points out, "To read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next" (*Image* 87). In a series of crafted mises en abyme Borges initiates a proliferating set of intra- and intertextual mirror games that complicate and contest the linear production of meaning.¹ The story's play with ambivalence, doubling, and analogy designs a labyrinthine space of Nietzschean repetitions and unsettling reflections. Rather than

providing a clear-cut solution of the enigma at its center, “Tema del traidor y del héroe” offers the disturbing discovery that narrative understanding occurs in a context of hermeneutical tension, interpretive plurality, and intellectual uncertainty—in the *in-between*, where our logocentric presuppositions of identity, affirmation, authority, and wholeness undergo substantial transformation. The strategies of repetition, mise en abyme, and deferral that Borges exploits in “Tema del traidor y del héroe” conjure up the sense of anxiety and intellectual uncertainty marking the phenomenon of the uncanny, as defined in Sigmund Freud’s seminal essay “Das Unheimliche” (1919). In “The Translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*” (1936) Borges himself suggested that there is a connection between the technique of the mise en abyme and the uncanny: “Isn’t it wonderful that in the 602nd night the king Shahriar hears his own story from the queen’s mouth? Repeating the general framework, a tale usually contains other tales . . . scenes within other scenes like in the tragedy of *Hamlet*. . . . What would a man, a Kafka, not do to organize and emphasize these games, repeat them according to the German distortion, the *Unheimlichkeit* of Germany?”² While the embedding of stories within stories, with their effects of duplication, and concentric, rather than linear, diegeses are Borgesian narrative trademarks (and, as such, they have been widely analyzed), the relation between these structures and the workings of the uncanny still remains to be addressed fully.³

“Something Secret, and Blind, and Central”: Borges and the Uncanny

As is well known, in “Das Unheimliche” Freud demonstrated that the word *heimlich* has a dual connotation.⁴ On the one hand, it refers to what is familiar, intimate, and friendly—what belongs to the house and arouses a sense of comfort. On the other hand, *heimlich* also defines something that is concealed, secret, and kept from sight, as well as something that is inaccessible to knowledge, obscure, even deceitful and dangerous. Though the negative form *unheimlich* generally applies to the first set of meanings and refers to matters that are unfamiliar, weird, and arouse fear, Freud noted how Schelling had underscored a meaning that relates to the second connotation of *heimlich*: “‘Unheimlich’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light” (“The Uncanny” 224).⁵ Freud concluded that “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambiva-

lence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich* ("The Uncanny" 224–26). The semantic relation between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* is not, as the grammatical convention of the prefix *un-* would imply, one of plain opposition (one term denying or contradicting the other) but, rather, one of complex ambivalence. A transgressive hybrid, *heimlich* denies as well as confirms its opposite, and so does its apparent contrary, *unheimlich*. The two terms then become, somewhat paradoxically, synonyms and antonyms at once, "antithetischen Doppelsinnes" ("antithetical double meanings"), Nietzschean doubles that foster a "conflict of judgment," as they unhinge the differential framework on which language founds itself.⁶

By endowing "Tema del traidor y del héroe" with the exemplary breadth typical of all his narrative production, Borges engages in a sustained dialogue that exceeds the boundaries of this single short story. Textual specificities (place, time, and definition of character) are mere tools, or pretexts, to address the discursive strategies that define narrative as a universal form of human understanding and identify the uncanny as marking the limits and aporias of such understanding. "Tema del traidor y del héroe" provides, in fact, only minimal details of setting, chronology, and psychological characterization. The overt author-narrator, a persona for Borges (with all of Borges's irony, of course), argues that his story's *chronotope* is only a matter of narrative convenience.⁷ He writes, "The action takes place in an oppressed yet stubborn country—Poland, Ireland, the republic of Venice, some South American or Balkan state. . . . Or took place, rather, for though the narrator is contemporary, the story told by him occurred in the mid or early nineteenth century—in 1824, let us say, for convenience's sake; in Ireland, let us also say" ("The Theme" 143).⁸ Significantly, this chronotope of convenience serves to build an eminently uncanny narrative structure.⁹ The story introduces multiple writers among its characters and features an author who lays bare the circumstances surrounding the making of his fictional narrative and self-consciously displays his creative persona. Writing, the first-person narrator/author informs us, belongs to the relaxed time of his "spare evenings," the *heimlich* domain of leisure, comfort, and pleasurable routine in which he has conceived a plot that he may commit to paper someday but still needs "details, rectifications, tinkering" ("The Theme" 143).¹⁰ Notwithstanding this initial feeling of intellectual and emotional harmony, the brief story that follows is defined by paradox and a sense of the absurd: "Tema del traidor y del héroe" is in fact the written rendition of what is still to be fully committed to paper. It is a work

in progress that inhabits the threshold between the not-yet-written and the already penned, between the story that is only imagined (“today . . . I see it in the following way” [“The Theme” 143]) and a chiseled finished product.¹¹ The author defines the narrative present, which bears the exact date of January 3, 1944 (the year of publication of Borges’s *Ficciones*), as a realm of generality and vagueness, wedged between the evenings past, in which the sketch was conceived, and a future where it will (perhaps) grow into a well-made plot.

While claiming ownership of this imperfect and ephemeral discourse, the author introduces a fleeting and evasive double who maintains a margin of creative independence from him. “There are areas of the story that have never been revealed to me” (“The Theme” 496), the author confesses, as he evokes a ghostly other who mischievously withholds elements of the plot from him.¹² The very notion of authorship as origin and foundation of what, using Deleuze’s terminology, one may define as a Platonic text appears strangely weakened at the very onset of the narrative. Borges constructs a persona who introduces himself as the narrative’s overt *auctor* and yet claims to be isolated and *set aside* from parts of his own invention, which belongs to someone else.¹³ This “act of doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self” fractures the Platonic framework based on a single principle of origins (Freud, “The Uncanny” 234). It evokes a secret of the text, a concealed hiatus or unfathomable gap, which the author’s ghostly double generates and controls. In the opening paragraph of “Tema del traidor y del héroe” the familiar self has already surreptitiously introduced its own Nietzschean double, its *uncanny* other.

In “Das Unheimliche” Freud discussed the figure of the “double” as among the most prominent sources of uncanny effects. By tracing the double back to its infantile origin, Freud interpreted it as a weapon crafted in the crucible of primary narcissism as insurance against the destruction of the ego and the power of death.¹⁴ Freud, however, also described the “surprising evolution” of the idea of the double. Referring to Otto Rank’s studies, he posited that, with the surmounting of the stage of primary narcissism, “the ‘double’ indeed reverses its aspect” (“The Uncanny” 235). From having been an assurance of immortality (by producing replicas of the self, the double ensures that the self cannot be destroyed), the double becomes the uncanny “harbinger of death” (“The Uncanny” 235). The “double,” therefore, contains its own Nietzschean other—its antagonistic mirror image.¹⁵ As I suggested in my introduction, the hermeneutical domain of the double implies that if “any absence is always

already [an] inverse inherent presence" (Elliott 213), at the same time, any presence is already an inverse inherent absence.¹⁶

"Tema del traidor y del héroe" presents numerous forms of doubling, and the mystery of a man's death (and, more extensively, of death as mystery) is at the center of the narrative. For example, the main author delegates the development of the story that he is in the very process of making up to another writer: "The narrator is a man named Ryan" ("The Theme" 143).¹⁷ Ryan is completing a biography of his great-grandfather, the nineteenth-century Irish revolutionary Fergus Kilpatrick, whose death centennial is approaching. Unknown assassins murdered Kilpatrick in a theater on August 6, 1824, and the circumstances of Kilpatrick's death are enigmatic enough that Ryan decides to explore the topic further. If we do not forget Ryan's double role of archival researcher (a kind of scholarly sleuth, like the protagonist of *Notturmo indiano*) and writer, we can recognize that the author stages himself as reporting the narrative that he imagines his double is putting together, that is, Ryan's rough draft for his biography of Fergus Kilpatrick. In one of Borges's typical mises en abyme, "*Tema del traidor y del héroe*" introduces an author who recounts what he imagines the narrator he has just invented is in the process of writing. In these crafted acts of doubling, Ryan is only a partial narrator at best. He owns the narrative's point of view and functions as the story's primary focalizer, but the voice remains that of the main author.

Another kind of self-doubling occurs when the author displays an ironic persona who borrows a style and linguistic register from which he often keeps a quasi-mocking distance. For example, introducing the protagonist of Ryan's biography, the author speaks with pathos "of the young, heroic, beautiful, murdered Fergus Kilpatrick, whose grave was mysteriously violated, whose name gives luster to Browning's and Hugo's verses, and whose statue stands high upon a gray hilltop among red bogs" ("The Theme" 143).¹⁸ The emphatic and clichéd use of adjectives culminating in the drastic finality of the past participle (murdered) and the ensuing counter clichéd reversal (it is not the poets who ennoble the man but, rather, the man who graces their lines) illustrate the author's ironic appropriation of the romantic language describing Kilpatrick. We may assume that this language belongs to the nineteenth-century documents that the author imagines Ryan is consulting for his biography. Similarly double (or mockingly duplicitous) is the author's following statement: "Kilpatrick was a conspirator and a secret and glorious captain of

conspirators. Like Moses, who from the land of Moab glimpsed yet could not reach the promised land, Kilpatrick perished on the eve of the victorious rebellion he had planned for and dreamed of" ("The Theme" 143).¹⁹

The earlier reference to Hugo's verses and the ensuing allusion to Moses cannot but recall *La légende des siècles* and implicitly compromises the accuracy of the historical document with epic invention. At the same time, the strangely coupled, almost oxymoronic, "secret and glorious" description of Kilpatrick introduces an ambivalence and mystery that Ryan, whom we imagine is both fascinated by and skeptical of the romanticized portrait of the founder of nations that he is receiving from these records, is determined to clear up.²⁰

As may be expected, the records to which Ryan has access are polarized according to the chroniclers' opposing politics and national alliances. While the hero-making narratives belong to Irish sources, the historians who claim that the failure of the police to apprehend Kilpatrick's killer did not "tarnish the good name of the police, since it is possible that the police themselves had Kilpatrick murdered" are obviously English ("The Theme" 144).²¹ While multiple, biased, and contradictory findings do not discourage, but rather motivate, the archival sleuth in his journey of discovery, certain aspects of the mystery first "disturb" and then cause "horror" in Ryan, thus invading a domain that "is deeper than mere detective work can fathom" ("The Theme" 144).²² Ryan perceives that the events surrounding Kilpatrick's death evoke "some secret shape of time, a pattern of repeating lines" ("The Theme" 144).²³ These circular patterns complicate the familiar linearity of history with the forbidding echoes and eerie recurrences of the uncanny. These recurrences challenge the self-determination and uniqueness of history's individual protagonists, who "seem to repeat or combine events from distant places, distant ages" ("The Theme" 144).²⁴

Freud had connected the idea of the doppelgänger with a broader phenomenon of doubling, that of the "unintended recurrence of the same situation," and the uncanny sense of something "fateful and inescapable" that accompanies it ("The Uncanny" 237). Freud identified the infantile source of these disturbing recurrences in "the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat' proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure-principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character" ("The Uncanny" 238). Whatever reminds us of this "compulsion

to repeat," Freud stated, is perceived as uncanny ("The Uncanny" 238).²⁵ The experience of this "perpetual recurrence of the same thing" as something that does not depend on an active choice, but as an occurrence over which people have no influence, creates the impression of some "'daemonic' force at work" ("Beyond" 611) that relentlessly causes the "repetition of the same fatality" ("Beyond" 604). Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis suggested that what is felt as "daemonic" is not so much the repetition of a specific need but the *need for repetition* itself (79).²⁶ Freud's connection between the compulsion to repeat and the death drive clarifies his associating the doppelgänger with death, doubling being the primary form of that "recurrence of the same" that Freud sees as defining the realm of the uncanny.²⁷

In "Tema del traidor y del héroe" the "repetition of the same fatality" is closely related to the recurrence of death, as Kilpatrick's murder echoes that of Julius Caesar and anticipates that of Lincoln. The strange analogies surrounding a common fate suggest to Ryan that Kilpatrick is the uncanny double of his Roman predecessor:

Everyone knows that the constables who examined the hero's body found a sealed letter warning Kilpatrick not to go to the theatre that night; Julius Caesar, too, as he was walking toward the place where the knives of his friends awaited him, received a note he never read—a note telling him of his betrayal and revealing the names of his betrayers. Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, saw in dreams a tower felled by order of the Senate; on the eve of Kilpatrick's death, false and anonymous rumors of the burning of the circular tower of Kilgarvan spread throughout the country—an event that may be taken as an omen, since Kilpatrick had been born in Kilgarvan. . . . [Ryan's] thoughts turn to the decimal history conceived by Condorcet, the morphologies proposed by Hegel, Spengler, and Vico, mankind as posited by Hesiod, degenerating from gold to iron. He thinks of the transmigration of souls, a doctrine that lends horror to Celtic literature and that Caesar himself attributed to the Druids of Britain. ("The Theme" 144)²⁸

Faced with the deepening mystery of Fergus's death and the web of uncanny recurrences surrounding it, Ryan investigates further. His next discovery, however, defers his reaching intellectual mastery of his great-grandfather's enigma and deviates and expands the narrative in a direction that Ryan views as "inconceivable" ("The Theme" 144), as it signals the paradoxical mixing of binary opposites and the reciprocal reversals of contrary elements that mark the uncanny. Here, the words that a beggar uttered to Kilpatrick before he was

murdered repeat (unspecified) lines in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Not only are historical facts unoriginal in their uncanny repetitions, but they also depend on fictional models, which raises the absurd suspicion that reality may be the mere copy of an invention—a quotation from a fictional text. Rather than providing prized and stable originals, ready to be repeated in the lucid world of Platonic copies, reality offers opaque simulacra, the ontological foundation of which is as heterogeneous, artificial, and elusive as that of the mutually reflexive narrators whose stories we are reading.

Discussing the connections between the mechanism of repression and that of the compulsion to repeat, Freud emphasized that the *return* of the repressed, which is so insistently repeated in the compulsive state, is not a return, or repetition, of the identical same. This return is, rather, the phantasmal recurrence of a distorted and ambivalent similarity, a similarity tainted by difference—precisely what Deleuze calls the Nietzschean repetition. Its unstable domain is mapped through strife and compromise, and its contested topography is a labyrinth of roundabout paths and devious routes. The repressed returns only by indirection, its forward progress slowed down by detours, hesitation, interruptions, and reversals. Complex processes of substitution, association, condensation, displacement, and conversion define the “transformative” nature of repetition in the domain of the uncanny:

If psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. If this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* [“the homely”] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. (“The Uncanny” 634)

Freud's argument that the “secret nature” of the uncanny is that it belongs to the class of frightening things that corresponds to “something repressed which *recurs*” does not imply a straightforward trajectory away from the familiar and back to it. The familiar that is repressed and then unwillingly exposed is not a mere repetition of an original essence, whatever that might be. It is, rather, a new and hybrid amalgam, an entity with a frighteningly ambivalent face: *a face that is at once familiar and alien*, something that obscurely partakes

of that which it simultaneously alters. Akin, therefore, to Deleuze's definition of the simulacrum in the Nietzschean type of repetition, the uncanny locates itself in the hollow space haunted by the ghostly similarity between two dissimilar things.²⁹ In this domain of reversibilities, differences remain differences but can turn into one another at the same time. At once familiar and strange, the uncanny defies synthesis and univocal definitions.³⁰ The uncanny is the intellectual domain where binary opposites coexist and the principle of noncontradiction falters, where self and other, subject and predicate, sameness and difference, reason and madness, presence and absence, and familiar and strange destabilize one another.³¹

As Ryan's investigation provides clues that bring him closer to the core of Kilpatrick's mystery, the story he unravels is interpolated with recursive traces, nesting arrangements, and strange silences, all of which subvert the progressive journey of detection. The next chapter in Ryan's quest introduces yet another figure of repetition. Ryan discovers records pertaining to James Alexander Nolan, the oldest of the hero's comrades and a writer himself. Nolan is the translator of Shakespeare's major plays into Gaelic and a scholar of the Swiss *Festspiele*, "vast peripatetic theatrical performances that require thousands of actors and retell historical episodes in the same cities, the same mountains in which they occurred" ("The Theme" 144).³² In an unpublished document, Ryan discovers that a few days before his death, the typically merciful Kilpatrick had signed the death sentence of a traitor whose name was erased from the record. This historical silence inspires the next step in Ryan's search, and he succeeds in deciphering the enigma and giving a face to the traitor. In an inexplicable act of mirroring, however, Ryan repeats the original erasure. His act of repression, an act that compulsively repeats the historical removal of the traitor's identity, excludes his whole investigation from his narrative: "This investigation," the narrator informs us in a parenthetical aside, is "one of the gaps in the book's narration" ("The Theme" 145).³³

Narrative's "Ineffable Center" and the Writer's "Despair"

Against all these repeated acts of repression and deferrals the author intervenes with a decisive "here's what happened" ("The Theme" 145), which turns Ryan's silence into what appears to be an eloquent report of his investigation.³⁴ The readers are told that Ryan discovered that Kilpatrick had appointed Nolan

to find out who was the traitor in their inner circle and that Nolan responded, “with irrefutable evidence,” that the traitor was none other than Kilpatrick himself.³⁵ Whether Kilpatrick really was a traitor or Nolan an envious second-in-command who framed an innocent man (or any other option in between) is a matter of our trust in the reliability of the narrative voice: we do not know what the exact evidence is or why it is irrefutable. With all its studied straightforwardness the author’s revelation hides the crucial secret that tarnishes the clarity of the detection process: the nature of the evidence itself—the objective proof to justify *a* death, or, in the short story’s universalizing framework, the elusive clue that would unveil the meaning of Death. The strident silence at the core of “Tema del traidor y del héroe” binds Nolan, Ryan, and the primary narrator together: these three figures of repetition emphatically and authoritatively invoke a “truth” that turns out to be an unsupported verbal trace, a hollow signifier masquerading as unassailable certainty.

After signing his own death sentence, Kilpatrick implores his comrades to do something to make sure that his punishment does not harm their cause, and Nolan conceives “a strange project” to grant Kilpatrick’s wish. He writes a play in which the traitor’s execution turns into “an instrument for the emancipation of the country” (“The Theme” 145).³⁶ The narrative that follows constitutes a summary of what Borges calls a “multiple execution”: the execution, that is, of Nolan’s play climaxing in the public execution of the play’s protagonist. In the actualization of Nolan’s play in the theater of history, the “making” and the “representation” of history are perfectly reversible and mutually reflective, Nolan having achieved a masterful transitivity between reality and invention by simply abolishing any difference between the two. Reality is Nolan’s play and Nolan’s play is reality, or, as Borges put it in “El teatro universal,” “life is the libretto.”³⁷

While the deep structure of Borges’s narrative supports the connection between the uncanny and death, in a perfectly Borgesian coup de théâtre, Kilpatrick’s death, though strange, is not uncanny. There is no “intellectual uncertainty” regarding an event that does not depend on some “daemonic force” binding Kilpatrick’s destiny to that of Julius Caesar and creating an inexplicable “repetition of the same fatality” (Freud, “Beyond” 611, 604). We are not dealing, here, with the terrifying and unintended recurrence of a situation that exceeds human control but, rather, with astute human machinations in a domain where a man’s fate is scrupulously engineered and craftily emplotted. Nolan, who lacks the time to write a complete play, plagiarizes scenes from

Shakespeare and cunningly exploits the enemy bard's art to advance the cause of Irish freedom.³⁸ Kilpatrick dies a hero's death, and history is made (up) according to the conventions of Elizabethan drama:

The public yet secret performance occurred over several days. The condemned man entered Dublin, argued, worked, prayed, reprehended, spoke words of pathos—and each of those acts destined to shine forth in glory had been choreographed by Nolan. Hundreds of actors collaborated with the protagonist; the role of some was complex, the role of others a matter of moments on the stage. . . . Kilpatrick, moved almost to ecstasy by the scrupulously plotted fate that would redeem him and end his days, more than once enriched his judge's text with improvised words and acts. Thus the teeming drama played itself out in time, until that August 6, 1824, in a box (prefiguring Lincoln's) draped with funereal curtains, when a yearned-for bullet pierced the traitor-hero breast. Between two spurts of sudden blood, Kilpatrick could hardly pronounce the few words given to him to speak. ("The Theme" 145–46)³⁹

Nolan's play, however, does not merely repeat Shakespeare's famed model: "in Nolan's play," the author writes with italicized emphasis, "the passages taken from Shakespeare are the *least* dramatic ones" ("The Theme" 146).⁴⁰ Ryan suspects that Nolan exploited the "least" dramatic Shakespeare "so that someone, in the future, would be able to stumble upon the truth" ("The Theme" 146).⁴¹ The *truth*, in other words, is that the play's *most dramatic* passages are Kilpatrick's life (and death), as staged with Nolan's spectacular and memorable choreography. Artifice *is* truth, and truth *is* artifice, and, on both counts, Nolan fares better than Shakespeare. Ireland's collective identity is founded upon this master narrative—a fiction that "endures in Ireland's history books and in its impassioned memory" ("The Theme" 145).⁴² Having to decide whether to disclose his discovery or maintain Nolan's invention, Ryan "realized that he, too, was part of Nolan's plot. . . . After long and stubborn deliberation, he decided to silence the discovery. He published a book dedicated to the hero's glory; that too, perhaps, had been foreseen" ("The Theme" 146).⁴³

Just as we were inclined to dismiss the uncanny from the execution of the plot, the assertion of Nolan's anticipatory control over Ryan shatters all reasonable expectations of realism and forces readers to accept the uncanny possibility that the nineteenth-century Nolan directed the life and actions of a twentieth-century man named Ryan. Like Kilpatrick, Ryan is the fore-

seen captive of a circular history that meticulously exorcizes the specters of change into a chiasmic game of mirrors and inexplicable repetitions. While Ryan realizes that the “circular labyrinths” that he evoked when attempting to explain Kilpatrick’s Caesar-like death were based on a flawed interpretation, the author does not eliminate the uncanny possibility of a recursive history when he suggests that Kilpatrick’s death prefigured Lincoln’s and that Ryan’s biography was already written out for him.

A different, yet parallel, reading of “Tema del traidor y del héroe” places the reasons behind Ryan’s circular history in an ideological framework. This reading, however, does not resolve the complexities of the narrative. It simply sheds light on a fragment of the story, which, as a whole, continues to be haunted by the specter of the uncanny. This reading requires us to interpret the statement that Ryan, too, “is part of Nolan’s plot” (“The Theme” 146) by viewing Ryan not as an individualized character but as an “actant” (to borrow Propp’s and Greimas’s terminology). As thus, he is a generic Irish writer performing the “function” of drafting Kilpatrick’s biography on the charged occasion of his commemorative anniversary. This ideal biographer would have different narrative options at his disposal. Among the numerous possibilities, he could echo the archetypal and foundational theme of Kilpatrick the hero, upon which the Irish nation was founded and defined itself. The dramatic power of Nolan’s staged reality consists in its ability to inspire its audience, endure in time, and shape the course of history. Ryan could also opt for the counternarrative that he discovered, a narrative based on the themes of duplicity, reversal of values, and coexistence of opposites that mark the complex dramatic structure of plays such as *Macbeth*. In “Sobre el *Vathek* de William Beckford” Borges recalled the witticism that Wilde attributed to Carlyle, regarding the project for a biography of Michelangelo that would not mention Michelangelo’s artworks at all. Borges added, “Reality is so complex, and history is so fragmented and simplified, that an omniscient observer could write an indefinite, and almost infinite, number of biographies of a man and each of them would emphasize different facts.”⁴⁴ None of these biographies would claim the right to absolute historical truth; however, one could safely foresee, with Nolan, that given some chronological and sociopolitical parameters, some biographies rather than others would be more likely to be written. A standard biography of Michelangelo without mention of his *Moses*, for example, would be as exceptional as a commemorative biography of a

founding father based on ethical ambiguity, historical uncertainty, and identity loss.⁴⁵

The author's persona in "Tema del traidor y del héroe" is ultimately responsible for a narrative architecture of such formal complexity that his initial statement about his sketch's incompleteness is as unconvincing as his claim about the areas of the text that remained unrevealed to him. In a typical interplay of doubling, masking, and self-staging, Borges exploits the persona of the unreliable author and his reticent other in order to demand the reader's critical involvement and highlight the gap at the center of "Tema del traidor y del héroe." As we have seen, this gap concerns the nature of the "irrefutable evidence" regarding Kilpatrick's treason and adds an ideological interpretation of the uncanny that enriches (but does not substitute) the psychoanalytical or supernatural parameters. If the uncanny is something that *"ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light,"* this something is not the truth about Kilpatrick's (alleged) treason, which, in fact, continues to evade us. The secret that has come to light, the collectively repressed element in the national master narrative, is *the ideology of history*—ideology that is consistently concealed by the effort to naturalize the historical records and present them as the plain reflections of what really happened in an objectively knowable past. Readers of "Tema del traidor y del héroe" have no certainty that Nolan's discovery of Kilpatrick's betrayal is any truer than the standard Irish legend of Kilpatrick the hero. All they have is an authoritative yet unsupported claim included in the author's report of Ryan's (censored) narrative about Kilpatrick's heroism, treachery, and sacrifice. This story is more sophisticated and multifaceted than the standard hero-making spectacle that Nolan engineered for facile public consumption. It is especially more sophisticated because, by making the author's report of Ryan's findings an ironically flawed detective narrative, Borges estranges the routine of detection and shows how interpreters often fail to question the authority that uncovers and disseminates the "irrefutable evidence" regarding historical events.

By projecting, displacing, multiplying, and breaking apart the authority principle and creative agency in charge of the narrative act in "Tema del traidor y del héroe," Borges shatters the belief in the possibility of knowing the truth about the past—that eminently uncanny domain. Yet Borges encourages investigation of the sites of authority from which history is given narrative form according to specific formal techniques, unconscious projections, and

ideological investments, without ever letting go of the dizzying doubt (the “vertigo” of “Las ruinas circulares”) that the *auctor* himself may indeed have been already *auctored* by someone else. And so on, ad infinitum. Like Freud’s essay on the uncanny, Borges’s short story stages a paradoxical and chiasmic game: the unraveled enigma of the uncanny is that the uncanny is, at its core, still an enigma. “Resolution,” René Prieto writes, “is simply not part of Borges’ scheme” (65). Doubt, Freud’s *Zweifel*, cannot be fully banned from the realm of the uncanny, and the story proves that one must accept the paradox that the investigation of the uncanny must take intellectual uncertainty as its acceptable outcome.

In this sense the uncanny is what Martin Heidegger identified as the space produced by the loss of certainty in divine images: where the place of God remains vacant, another domain is invented. This domain cannot be the consoling Platonic repetition of God’s sphere in the human realm but is a liminal or interstitial region, a ghostly gap, a simulacrum based on ambivalence. Forever *abseits*, in Freud’s own words, the uncanny discourages the certainty of hermeneutical closure and conjures up a horizon that continues to recede as one advances, forever denying access to the port of arrival. The quest for the uncanny defies the intellectual presupposition that the “object” of investigation is a stable and unchanging entity and the same shifting position pertains to the perceiving subject as well.⁴⁶ By presenting a sleuth or riddle-solver (Ryan) who is doubled by a *doppelgänger* (whom we called the author) who interferes with his investigation and continues to impose doubt on any attempt at narrative closure, “Tema del traidor y del héroe” stages the hermeneutical complexities of the uncanny. Furthermore, the tale’s narrative creates a binary, yet deeply interconnected, movement: while the linear narrative attempts to solve the mystery at the core of “Tema del traidor y del héroe,” the circular making of the text resists and contradicts the forward movement of detection. Thus, the *interdimensional* connection between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic narrative levels comes to the foreground in all its dualism and ambiguity.⁴⁷ Simultaneous yet antagonistic, complementary yet at odds with each other, the two levels negate what they assert and undermine what they support in an oscillating movement that is neither progressive nor regressive but an amalgam of both. The uncanny is a hesitation (the mark of intellectual uncertainty) that does not produce stasis but intellectual and affective tension (anxiety). Together, the two narrative levels create the “uncanny domain,” a

domain defined by ambivalence, undecidability, and the collapse of all fixed boundaries between subject and object.

The authorial function also manifests itself in the narrative redundancy of "Tema del traidor y del héroe." The raconteur displays a veritable zest to generate a web of connected stories (Ryan's, Shakespeare's, Nolan's) and thus to carve intertextual paths that create a narrative proliferation that resists wholeness and resolution but also defers closure and ending, thus forestalling the final dissolution of the subject. On its last sentence "Tema del traidor y del héroe" merely stops, orthographically, yet Borges evades conclusiveness by hinting at the persistence of the uncanny and of the narratives that may attempt (and fail) to explain it away. Borges's mimicking Scheherazade's archetypal act of staving off death through narrative is ironically self-conscious here. In its blatantly *repetitive* structures and mushrooming taxonomies, strategically delayed and persistently resumed narratives, full of intertextual detours and metadiscursive clues, Borges's "compulsion to narrate" plays out its own reversal. "From having been an assurance of immortality," the narrative generates its own doppelgänger and "becomes the uncanny harbinger of [the subject's] death." In the effort to define an enigmatic and persistently elusive object, Borges's writing stages and performs the dissolution of the very structure of subjectivity.⁴⁸

Arguably, the dissolving of the autonomous subject implies dependence on a linguistic system that cancels out the author's individuality as the active origin of his text and constructs him as a subject position, a mere discursive function within the structure of language. This approach, which echoes Roland Barthes's and Michel Foucault's well-known arguments about the death of the author, emphasizes the space of the text as a domain in which "the writing subject . . . disappears" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 102). However, "Tema del traidor y del héroe" reveals an ambivalent, "double" movement. The fragmentation of the writing subject is self-consciously staged by an Author who is a masterful technician of the narrative craft—a wily strategist skilled at exploiting narrative techniques and stylistic formulas, who is in total control of the tools of his trade. Borges's display of his professional and autobiographical "I" in the here and now of his narrative *discours* is an act that can be interpreted as his claiming ownership of his empirical being in the very space that creates him as an *être de papier*.⁴⁹

"All literary work," writes Tzvetan Todorov, tells the story of its creation

through its plot."⁵⁰ The plot of "Tema del traidor y del héroe" thematizes its own construction as uncanny narrative—a narrative that is the inverted mirror image of a story of detection and discovery. Borges thus invites his readers to tune in to the elusive "something more" that the text enacts: the process, that is, of constructing itself as (uncanny) narrative by exhibiting the labors and drawbacks of the protagonist's analytical quest. It is on this process level that the uncanny unfolds itself, not as external object of study but as part of the text's diegesis—part of its *modus operandi*. As a peculiar *mise en abyme*, "Tema del traidor y del héroe" displays the uncanny as the metaphoric pattern that is internalized in its self-reflexive textuality: the gap at the core of "Tema del traidor y del héroe" is the representation of what puts into question the possibility of full definition itself. In this sense the uncanny is not only an emotional state or a mixed series of themes, often based on the blurring of such boundaries as those between life and death, reality and imagination, subject and object, familiarity and strangeness. It is also a form of textual emplotment built on ambivalence and hybridism, performing its own conflicted genesis and nonlinear development. Defying Foucault's claim that, by showing off its own narrative mechanics, the self-referential text has no other function than "to curve back in a perpetual return upon itself, as if its discourse could have no other content than the expression of its own form" (*The Order* 300), the emplotment of "Tema del traidor y del héroe" furnishes a metacommentary on its own content. By staging what it cannot fully define, the "execution" of the plot (as "constative" linear discourse) estranges and ironically fulfills itself as a "performative" event.⁵¹ By displaying the paradoxes and ambiguities—in fact, by even *staging* the falling apart—of its hermeneutical quest, Borges's story becomes an apt metaphor of the uncanny itself: the uncanny *product* is in the *process*; strangeness is born, indeed, at home.

Borges's "Tema del traidor y del héroe" transforms "the process of its own making, of *poiesis*" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 20), into an uncanny experience ripe with epistemological anxiety and ontological displacement. Borges upsets the founding hermeneutical presuppositions of his narrator's quest—the very existence of an independent subject and the reality of an object that could be targeted in order to reach its conceptual core. At the same time, Borges exorcises the subject's passive submission to the opaque enigma of the uncanny and displays a different kind of interpretive participation. By staging the repeated desire and failure to assign an ultimate meaning to the text, Borges does not merely engage in "an anti-theological activity, an activity that is

truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law" (Barthes, *Image* 147). Borges transforms the impossible discovery of the essence of the uncanny into a suggestive textual *event*. This event combines the narrator's teleological urge and rational hubris to discover and give shape to the past with the author's diagnosis of the compulsive and collective acts of repressions that mark the allegedly objective realm of historiography. But neither the historian nor the psychoanalyst can fully resolve the mystery of the uncanny: the text's labyrinthine detours and compulsively repeated structures cause the loss of orientation that inspired, among other things, the "undefined horrors" of Borges's "inextricable labyrinths" ("About William Beckford's *Vathek*" 140).⁵²

From Icon to Simulacrum

Bertolucci's *La strategia del ragno* and the Urban Labyrinths of the Uncanny

In accord with the very movement of Western metaphysics, for which every center is the site of truth, our city's center is always *full*.

ROLAND BARTHES, *EMPIRE OF SIGNS*

I see them as infinite, elemental
Executors of an ancient pact,
To multiply the world like the act
Of begetting. Sleepless. Bringing doom.
They prolong this hollow, unstable world
In their dizzying spider's-web;
Sometimes in the afternoon they are blurred
By the breath of a man who is not dead.

JORGE LUIS BORGES, "MIRRORS"

Just like Fellini's adaptation of Poe's "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Bertolucci's adaptation of Borges's "Tema del traidor y del héroe" has been generally labeled a "free" reading of its literary predecessor. These types of adaptation, critics contend, aim not at fidelity but, rather, replacement. A strong creative personality takes over a narrative that, *in ultima analisi*, remains a mere pretext to produce an original and independent work, according to the ideal of the artist "in sole control of his creative and aesthetic endeavours" (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 3). To play on Henry James's famed metaphor on the genre of the romance, we could say that this approach views the source text as the temporary tethering place for a balloon that the new creative master will launch as soon as the fire of inspiration gets hot.¹ Romantic prejudices are hard to quench, and so are binary views of adaptation. Though admitting oversimplification, Morris Beja argues that there are "probably two basic approaches to the whole question of adaptation. The first approach asks that

the *integrity* of the original work . . . be preserved, and therefore that it should not be tampered with. . . . The second approach feels it proper and in fact necessary to adapt the original work freely, in order to create . . . a new different work of art with its own *integrity*" (82; emphasis added). Like Borges in "Tema del traidor y del héroe," Bertolucci mocks the simplistic and consoling logic of binary opposites and shatters all absolute notions of integrity and autonomy—in the adapting process, as well as in the adapted text. Adaptation becomes the stage where a "family" romance unfolds, and simultaneously cumbersome and phantasmal authority figures replace the chimeras of originality and freedom with oedipal conflict, causing the "anxiety of influence" famously discussed by Harold Bloom.²

In an interview entitled "Quattro città, una conversazione" ("Four Cities, One Conversation"), conducted by Francesco Casetti in 1975, Bertolucci argued that the elusive topography of Tara, the Italian setting of *La strategia del ragno*, resulted from his need to give visual form to the unconscious after undergoing his first sessions of Freudian analysis:

Tara is a very infantile word, too: "Tara" is like the word uttered by a child who is learning to speak; perhaps it is the way to say "dear" to his mother. It is not by chance that this town was born two or three months after I began undergoing psychoanalysis, in a moment of great enthusiasm for the discovery of Freud. . . . Tara represents . . . my renouncing Parma, perhaps because I felt the need to condemn my father's culture in a special way, and I think that this need is a bit present in all of my films. From this condemnation and my need for a new identity, I got the idea of creating a new city, different from Parma, tied in too many ways to the father figure. Then there was Borges's somewhat surrealistic inspiration and the attempt to materialize a city representing the unconscious, that is, a city where the terms of reality are abolished and there are only children and elderly people.³

Here Bertolucci underscores his relationship with two powerful artists (his father, the poet Attilio Bertolucci, and Borges), and indeed the father-child relationship is a prominent theme in *The Spider's Stratagem*. Although the concluding lines of Bertolucci's citation imply that there are no fathers in Tara, only children and elderly people, this does not mean that Bertolucci used the space of adaptation to reclaim a utopian realm of creative independence. Bertolucci's adaptive process self-consciously carves an *in-between* made of citational homage and iconoclastic subversion. Bertolucci filmed a story that

is as rich in intertextual references and nesting stories as Borges's "Tema."⁴ In *La strategia del ragno* Bertolucci demonstrates his affinity for and understanding of the deep structures of Borges's short story. Like Borges, Bertolucci deploys the mode of the uncanny, and the interrelated workings of Platonic and Nietzschean repetitions, to challenge foundational notions of origin and authority. Bertolucci, however, both retains and transforms Borges's emblematic and universalizing chronotope. *La strategia del ragno's* historically and culturally specific domain is not chosen for mere "narrative convenience" but to provide the necessary setting to represent the drama of fascist fathers as seen from the inquisitive and troubled eyes of their descendants. Following Bertolucci's cue, much has been written about Tara as the manifestation of a city embodying the unconscious. "*The Spider's Stratagem* has the architecture of a dream," Robert Zaller writes as he proceeds to juxtapose "real Parma [against] imaginary Tara" (Zaller 810).⁵ My reading of *La strategia del ragno* suggests that to understand Bertolucci's adaptation, we need to connect the *emblematic* space of the unconscious—the dream-city of Tara—to its concrete *historical* template, Vespasiano Gonzaga's Renaissance city of Sabbioneta, where the film was shot.⁶

Sabbioneta, the Last Platonic Utopia

The materialization of a Renaissance autocrat's ambitious dream, Sabbioneta was built between 1551 and 1562, from a preexisting settlement of Roman origin on the left bank of the Po River between Mantua and Parma.⁷ Though, politically, Sabbioneta died with the death of Vespasiano in 1591, architecturally, it remains a seminal example of a Renaissance ideal city. Analysis of the ideological and aesthetic tenets that governed the construction of Sabbioneta helps us understand Bertolucci's subversion of this town's Renaissance topography into the uncanny spaces of *La strategia del ragno*. Tara repeats Sabbioneta in a way that is evocatively similar yet disturbingly different from its historical referent, thus representing Bertolucci's cinematic rendition of the notion of the "uncanny," as expressed in Freud's essay and Borges's "Tema del traidor y del héroe."

In *La strategia del ragno* Bertolucci filmed the urban space of Sabbioneta in a way that is photorealistically accurate and, simultaneously, eerily unreal. Any viewer familiar with Sabbioneta recognizes the city's long arcades, massive walls, archways below the Galleria degli Antichi, piazzas, and red clay roofs.

Snippets of conversations in the local dialect, the interior of the *osteria* and the *pensione*, references to local trades and pastimes, and colorful characters such as Gaibazzi, the “assaggiatore di culatelli” (“ham taster”) witness Bertolucci's almost maniacal commitment to the sense of real life in the *bassa padana*. Yet the referential concreteness of *La strategia del ragno* expresses itself in a medium that Bertolucci, with an allusion to Borges, saw as made “of the same stuff that dreams are made of” (Ungari 11; Borges, “The Circular Ruins” 98). Bertolucci's mystifying use of flashbacks and temporal anachronisms and his circling, fluid camera movements—so reminiscent of Borges's nonlinear plot in “Tema del traidor y del héroe”—heighten the illogical feeling of situations and dialogue, thus blurring without erasing the film's referential sharpness.⁸ Similarly, the precision of the actors' diction, both in the *Emiliano* dialect and in the regional inflection of the characters' standard Italian, merges with a deliberately stilted, stylized, and “unrealistic” performance.⁹

La strategia del ragno engages in a dialogue with the deep narrative of Borges's “Tema del traidor y del héroe” by repeating, without replicating, Borges's quintessentially uncanny stage. Bertolucci exploits a foundational Platonic paradigm not only to negate it but to establish it as its own Nietzschean counterpart, hollowing out its logocentric premises and leaving behind ambivalent simulacra, neither familiar nor strange, neither present nor absent. The sign identifying Tara's train station—its washed-out words made *almost* illegible by the abuse of the weather and the neglect of time—and the disembodied voice asking “Where am I?” at the beginning of the film, underscore that the town (and the subject that is about to inhabit it) is both “there” and “not there.” Referentially solid and cinematically constructed, like its ghostly train station, Tara is the uncanny counterpart of Sabbioneta. Therefore, to understand *unheimliche* Tara, one must explore the historical vestiges of *heimliche* Sabbioneta.

Particularly in the context of current North American audiences often removed from local Italian history, one should be reminded that *La strategia del ragno* was produced for the Italian State television network, RAI, in 1970 and dedicated to the Emilia Romagna region (Casetti, Bertolucci 14). As Bertolucci explained: “I would have liked [for *The Spider's Stratagem*] to be the first film produced by the Emilia Romagna region, which was just born at that time. Its regional character was very important to me. . . . I believe that regional means popular and that popular means regional.”¹⁰ Bertolucci refers to the creation of autonomous regional governments in Italy after the social instability of the late 1960s. Historians describe the political atmosphere of that time “as one of

euphoria" (Ferri and White 90) for the "initiation of a revolutionary period in which direct citizen participation . . . would bring the stifling centralized system, imposed on the country in 1948, to a close" (Leonardi 14). A leader in the regionalist movement, Emilia Romagna obtained significantly greater local autonomy in the early 1970s thanks to a coalition between the local branches of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), numerous grassroots movements, and the media (Ferri and White 91). If Borges emphasized the emblematic nature of his setting, Bertolucci worked in a far more specific framework: one that celebrated Emilia Romagna's political autonomy, regional identity, and collective history. *La strategia del ragno* implied a public familiar, or eager to become familiar, with Sabbioneta, one of Emilia Romagna's most spectacular, yet forgotten, *città d'arte e di storia*. A rebellious child of Emilia Romagna, Bertolucci demanded understanding of Sabbioneta's "Platonic" past as a prerequisite to participation in Tara's "Nietzschean" revision of this foundational and patriarchal history precisely (and ironically) on the occasion of the public celebration of such history.

The expression of its founder Vespasiano Gonzaga's ambition of *imperiale maestà*, Sabbioneta fulfills Deleuze's definition of Platonic repetition.¹¹ "Nea Roma," Sabbioneta displays Vespasiano's program of nostalgic revival of Rome's classical glory in the inscription running along the façade of its theater: "Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet" ("Its ruins themselves teach us how great Rome was"). Rome and its ruins inspire the Renaissance prince's project to restore the *Urbs'* former magnificence through imitation and by proxy. In a meticulously choreographed act of emulation, Sabbioneta's urban space is structured, via erudite citations and replication of popular *topoi*, in the image of its famed predecessor, and Rome is reborn on the Po riverbanks.¹² Vespasiano's town thus acquires its own historical identity and cultural significance insofar as it repeats core elements of Rome—it is both "a city" and the icon of "the city" (Forster, "From 'Rocca'" 31). As author and chief denizen of Sabbioneta's symbolic topography, Vespasiano celebrates himself as a second Aeneas and a novel Augustus, and the town's iconography follows the fabled history of the Roman Empire, progressing from Aeneas to its heroes and Caesars down to Vespasiano himself.¹³ Perhaps the most detailed self-display according to these principles occurs in the Galleria degli Antichi, a ninety-six-meter-long gallery above an arched portico along the eastern side of Piazza Castello (now Piazza d'Armi) (fig. 8.1).¹⁴ Size and location accentuated the symbolic importance of this gallery, the notable length of which is magnified by the fugue



Figure 8.1. Fresco with architectural *trompe l'oeil*. Galleria degli Antichi, Sabbioneta, Italy. Scala / Art Resource, New York. Photo used by permission.

of windows on both sides of the long walls and the *trompe-l'oeil* perspectives painted, like theatrical scenarios, on the short walls.

Anticipating the function of a museum gallery, but also exploiting the triumphal semiotics of its spectacular *mise-en-scène*, the Galleria was devoted to Vespasiano's antiquarian collections and to the exhibition of artworks organized to mirror Vespasiano's ideological and cultural program. The humanistic celebration of *uomini antichi* and *uomini illustri*, selected as *exempla* for the present, shared space with family insignia and frescoes of allegorical fig-

ures and mythical feats. Together, they created an ideal sequence that paid tribute to the civic and military virtues of the “buon principe.” Vespasiano legitimized and commemorated himself through an elitist iconographic and architectonic language that, in its time-honored symbolism, was as generally comprehensible as the family emblems that graced the walls of the Galleria.¹⁵ In particular, by combining the expressions of dynastic belonging and moral virtue, the Gonzaga emblem that Vespasiano inherited from his father united the majesty, strength, and courage of the Bohemian lion with the Imperial eagle’s authority and conquering, expansive power.

While the *imitatio* of Rome and its Caesars is a common theme in the architectural and iconographic culture of sixteenth-century *principati*, what distinguished Sabbioneta was the pervasiveness of its design and its belatedness.¹⁶ As a late humanist’s plan to turn an imagined domain—modeled on imperial Rome and inspired by contemporary discussions on ideal cities—into a lived if anachronistic reality, Vespasiano’s Sabbioneta is one of the most fully realized examples of sixteenth-century urbanism in Italy.¹⁷ Vespasiano shared his age’s fascination with the utopian suggestions of Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* while responding to the pragmatic needs detailed in the many treatises of military architecture that created the concrete exempla of Mirandola, Terra del Sole, La Valletta, Livorno, and Guastalla.¹⁸ Vespasiano’s city was indeed raised on illustrious theoretical foundations.¹⁹ The ideal city was at the core of Filarete’s *Trattato di architettura* (1460–64), with its rules for the creation of the radial city of Sforzinda, inscribed within an eight-pointed star of walls (fig. 8.2), and Francesco di Giorgio Martini’s *Trattato di architettura, ingegneria e arte militare* (1476–85), with its project for a similarly star-shaped polygonal urban domain.²⁰ The Renaissance ideal city, with its geometric and centered schemes, was not a mere aesthetic concept, based on the Vitruvian concepts of symmetry and proportion, but also the political representation of the *signorie*’s centralized and authoritarian regimes.²¹ Like Enea Silvio Piccolomini’s Pienza and Federico da Montefeltro’s Urbino, Vespasiano’s Sabbioneta realized an ambivalent program, endowed with two apparently mutually exclusive goals. On the one hand, the model city of Sabbioneta was meant to display its prince’s military clout and cultural authority in the here and now of contemporary politics and in the diplomatic arena of treatises and alliances that granted the survival of a small *principato* in late sixteenth-century Italy. On the other hand, Sabbioneta aspired at evading history altogether by creating a utopia of absolute balance.²² In this static and disciplined microcosm mod-

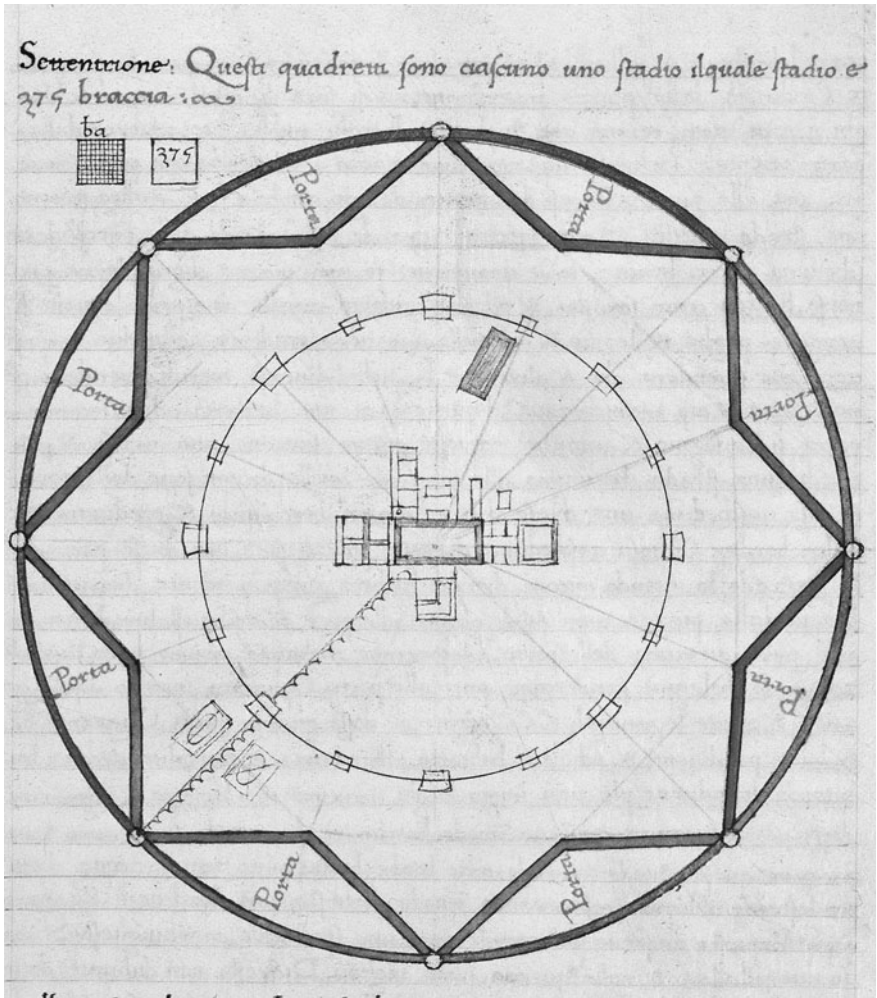


Figure 8.2. Filarete (Antonio di Pietro Averlino, 1400–c. 1469). Magliabechiano MS: *Treatise on Architecture* II-I 140, Folio 43v. Plan of “Sforzinda.” Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Italy. Scala / Art Resource, New York. Photo used by permission.

eled upon *la città eterna*, all change and decay were exiled beyond the magic star-shaped boundary of the city's walls.²³

Although scholars concur that Sabbioneta represents the clearest sixteenth-century attempt to give concrete form to an ideal city, it is important that, as a late humanist realization, Sabbioneta displays significant alterations from

its theoretical precedents. Vespasiano revised the fixed geometric layout of the cities of Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Pietro Cataneo with planimetric irregularities that hark to the Mannerist era (fig. 8.3). Sabbioneta's orthogonal layout, with its rectilinear streets, unencumbered perspectives, and symmetrical forms, reveals meaningful anomalies that disrupt the regularity of a conventional gridiron plan.²⁴ Although Sabbioneta's orthogonal design repeats the scheme of the Roman *castrum*, with the *decumanus* identifying the city's main axis, the *cardus* is broken up into a series of nonrectilinear segments, interrupted by a series of T-shaped crossings that create a zigzagging path. Rather than having a main square—traditionally the city's fulcrum at the intersection of *cardus* and *decumanus*—Sabbioneta displays a polycentric design, with two main piazzas, both placed in off-centered positions.²⁵ The two doors to the city, albeit diametrically opposed, are built on different spatial axes so that the *decumanus*, which connects them, follows a disorienting path.²⁶

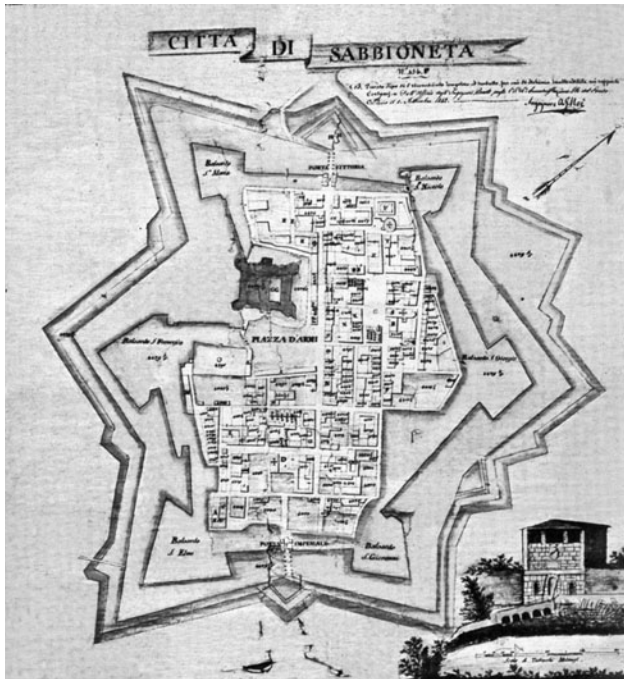


Figure 8.3. Map of Sabbioneta. Sala Consiliare, Sabbioneta. Courtesy of Pro Loco Sabbioneta.

The labyrinthine layout of Sabbioneta may have had a defensive strategic role, but the labyrinth fulfills functions that surpass the strictly military. The labyrinth as urban metaphor connects Sabbioneta to the great cities of classical and biblical antiquity.²⁷ Influential architectural works of the Renaissance such as Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* and Serlio's *Libri cinque d'architettura* included a number of maze plans and labyrinth patterns. As one of the famed Gonzaga emblems, the labyrinth tied Vespasiano and his *Residenzstadt* to his powerful neighboring relatives, the Gonzagas of Mantua, who, in turn, had linked the image of the labyrinth to their imagined Olympian origins in a well-known mural of the *Sala dei cavalli* in Mantua's ducal palace.²⁸

Vespasiano—*urbs conditor*—saw himself as repeating Daedalus, the archetypal architect and maker of the Cretan labyrinth. Following a familiar blueprint, historical and mythical origins merge in the labyrinth imagery in Sabbioneta, endowing it with a powerful foundational meaning. But what is significant for my analysis of Borges and Bertolucci is that the labyrinth of Sabbioneta also ushers in a different symbolism, one that marks the impending crisis of the centralized ontology and foundational logic discussed so far. Unlike the classical unicursal labyrinth, which leads to its center and involves no “false paths, not a single *cul-de-sac*, but simply the longest involved path from the entrance to the eye” (Lethaby 134), the labyrinth of Sabbioneta is what Umberto Eco, in another context, defines as a “mannerist maze” (57). With its multicursal pattern, featuring false turnings and dead ends, and demanding repeated choices that involved as many chances for error, the mannerist labyrinths became “spiders’ webs of enticing false paths” (Lethaby 129). Furthermore, by “doubling” its topographical center into two main piazzas, and shifting them just slightly off-sides, the labyrinth of Sabbioneta estranged the notion of absolute origin that it simultaneously, and so redundantly, advocated. In this context the labyrinth becomes the sign of an impending epistemic break: the symbolic location of the *omphalos* or *umbilicus* of the world is about to turn into a domain of liminality, a boundary between without and within, and, albeit only and still *in nuce* at Sabbioneta, the uncanny place of hermeneutical ambivalence and ontological displacement. At the end of the sixteenth century Vespasiano was already part of the era that ushered in the decadence of *signorie* and *principati*. As a copy of Rome, Sabbioneta partakes of the eternal city’s foundational mythology, borrows its prestige, and reproduces its celebrated identity, tinting it in the tones of melancholia and nostalgia. In its redundant symbolism Sabbioneta foregrounds its duplicative



Figure 8.4. Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552–1616). Interior of the Theater (Teatro all'Antica), Sabbioneta, Italy. Scala / Art Resource, New York. Photo used by permission.

status and staged selfhood, thus emphasizing the longing for a world of epic grandeur that can only be experienced by proxy and imitation and through planned fabrication and self-conscious antiquarian revival.

The illusionistic and staged dimension of Sabbioneta found its climax in its theater, the interior of which was designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi from 1588 to 1590.²⁹ As the space where Vespasiano's public persona was both displayed to the public and ritualized, Scamozzi's theater featured erudite allusions to ancient Rome (fig. 8.4).³⁰ The semicircular *cavea* and the loggia with Corinthian columns and crowned by twelve Olympian deities replicate sixteenth-century reconstructions of the Theatrum Marcelli.³¹ The decorations of the loggia's walls include niches with monochromatic frescoes of Roman emperors. In the middle of the loggia Titus Flavius Vespasianus is represented in the act of offering a laurel crown. We have to imagine that the central area in the loggia would have been reserved for Vespasiano, who, *primus inter pares*, received the laurel from the ninth emperor in a staged continuation of Rome's imperial legacy.

The stage, with its receding permanent set representing a townscape, was

a reflection of Sabbioneta just as Sabbioneta as a whole was conceived in theatrical terms. Scamozzi created an organic space that involved the viewing public in the theatrical action rather than separating stage from audience. The audience received the impression of sitting in an open-air portico facing a city with a street in the foreground. This street, built according to perspective, occupied the proscenium and was crowned by the profile of the buildings frescoed on the surrounding walls (Calendoli 100).³² The city was more real than imaginary, however. As Niccolò De' Dondi reported, in 1586 Vespasiano ordered that the façades of the buildings in Via Giulia, Sabbioneta's main artery, be decorated with frescoes and embellished with marble sills (341). A later chronicler marveled that, with these ornamentations, the entire town appeared transformed into a theater.³³ The theater of Sabbioneta, designed to imitate a public exterior, duplicated a larger urban space that, in turn, functioned as a meticulously choreographed set for public performance.³⁴ As Bertolucci understood well, the real city, the ideal city, and the city as theatrical metaphor became interchangeable domains in Sabbioneta, mirror-images reflecting one another in the narcissistic self-celebration and self-contemplation of a man and his court.³⁵

Vespasiano gained access to his *loggia* from the theater's entrance of honor, opening on Via Giulia, and reserved for him and his retinue. This entrance's interior wall displays a fresco of a triumphal arch framing a view of Hadrian's Mausoleum. When entering the theater from this door, the duke would have seen, right on the opposite wall, another door surrounded by a fresco of an identical triumphal arch with an illustration of the Capitoline Hill. Above both arches, painted loggias display images of *gentildonne* and *gentiluomini* captured in the act of looking down at the door, as if expecting Vespasiano's arrival. The spectacle of the duke's entrance into his theater was thus exquisitely staged, exhibiting his current magnificence as the reflection of the glory of a Caesar victoriously returning to Rome.

The reflective interchangeability between life and art in the prince's theatrical self-exhibition bears important ideological and ethical implications, as it blurs the boundaries between reality and appearance, inner truth and exterior display, and *être* and *paraître*. In his *Idea dell'architettura universale* Scamozzi argued that loggias were named after the Greek word *Logeo*, that is, an eminent and lofty place and commented that "in truth, among the five Orders, there is not one that is more significant and beautiful than the Corinthian. . . . This order represents the sincerity of the soul."³⁶ In the celebratory allegory of

Scamozzi's theatrical space the majestic place reserved for the prince identified sociopolitical eminence with *virtus*.³⁷ In turn, the prince's self-revelation occurred in an eminently staged domain where dramatic self-display was contrived to portray inner authenticity, thus artfully uniting the artifices of a recurring theatrical spectacle with the persistent exercise of moral truth: "la vida es el libreto." As Forster points out when describing Vespasiano's "absolutist theater," the elevated loggia from which Vespasiano overlooked the stage with the urban permanent set replicated his privileged perspective from his palace's balcony, with its commanding view of the square below. Not only was the stage décor "conditioned in its perspectival distortions by the princely point of view" (Forster, "Stagecraft" 74), but from his central elevated position, the duke could see the spectators below him as they looked up at him and his retinue. Sabbioneta's princely theater, where Vespasiano was both the prime spectator and the main actor, was a space replete with public meaning, which repeated and confirmed the fixed hierarchy of Sabbioneta's urban domain. Urban planning in Sabbioneta transformed life into a play that ritually designated the meaning of the city's various places and parts (Forster, "From 'Rocca'" 33).

Vespasiano's anachronistic revival of ancient Rome was all the more spectacular as it already contained the germ of its own dissolution under the thrust of the Counter Reformation and the crisis of the Renaissance.³⁸ In a painstakingly planned *mise-en-scène*, sixteenth-century Sabbioneta and its inhabitants played an imperial drama designed for its *signore*, who nostalgically donned Caesar's robe in an effort to ground his *piccola Roma* upon the imitation of the original's identity, while remaining aware of his program's belatedness and artifice. As Benjamin states: "There is a dual will to happiness, a dialectics of happiness: a hymnic and an elegiac form. The one is the unheard-of, the unprecedented, the height of bliss; the other, the eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original, the first happiness" ("The Image of Proust" 204). On a stage tinged with melancholia, Platonic repetition ushers in its *uncanny* counterpart, just as the ideal city's labyrinthine layout both affirmed and ever so slightly decentered and doubled its essentialist Platonic core.³⁹ If the center of Sabbioneta was marked with a statue of Pallas Athena, the classical protector of cities and crafty weaver of both tapestries and wars, Athena was also she who transformed Arachne, who had dared challenge her to a weaving contest, into a spider. Bertolucci's own "spider's strategy" consists in transforming Vespasiano's willed design based on Platonic repetition

into the Nietzschean tapestry of his cinematic Tara, thus sharing Borges's erudite deconstruction of Western foundational myths, hegemonic discourses, and imperial identities.

Sabbioneta's *Unheimlich* Simulacrum: Tara in *La strategia del ragno*

Bertolucci recognized that, besides the alliteration with *cara* mentioned in the interview with Casetti, he was thinking about the O'Hara plantation of *Gone with the Wind* when he selected the name *Tara* for the city of *La strategia del ragno*.⁴⁰ Critics have remarked that Bertolucci may also have recalled the mythical hill of Tara, the seat of the High Kings of Ireland, and the island's spiritual and political core until the sixth century A.D. More obviously, the connection of the term *Tara* with spiders (as in *tarantula*, for example) has been widely acknowledged. All these references to Tara define a symbolic framework built on ambivalence. This framework includes, on the one hand, the idyllic bond between mother and child and the nostalgic resurrection of a mythical paradise, and, on the other hand, danger, conflict, and violence. The framework also includes authority (of the father, the king), though this authority is ambivalent in itself, as it can be benevolent or malicious in the preservation or destruction of a pristine, original bliss.

In Bertolucci's Tara-Sabbioneta the city's founding father is surprisingly absent; the film's urban landscape, so referentially precise in numerous other instances, bears no sign of Vespasiano. Vespasiano's all-encompassing program of identity-building based on Platonic repetition is erased from *La strategia del ragno* and systematically replaced with references to and signs of Athos Magnani Sr., the film's antifascist leader, who was shot in the back during a performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto* on June 15, 1936. *La strategia del ragno* thus replaces Sabbioneta's Renaissance identity with Tara's postwar selfhood. However, as he repeats Vespasiano in his role as the town's "father," Athos Magnani unsettles the principle of Platonic repetition on which Vespasiano built his persona and his ideal domain. Sabbioneta's world of copies gives way to Tara's world of simulacra—a world that, like Borges's cosmogonies—is built on ambivalence. In Tara, rather than echoing a foundational self that validates them according to the scheme of Platonic repetition, identities break apart in the process of searching for a place of origin that cannot be found, only desired and constructed by artifice.

The protagonist of *La strategia del ragno*, Athos Magnani Jr. (Giulio Brogi), travels to his family hometown of Tara from Milan. Just like in *Nocturne indien*, a letter prompts him to set out on his journey. The sender, Draifa (Alida Valli), was the “official mistress” of Athos’s father, who bore his son’s identical name. Draifa saw Athos’s photograph in a Milan newspaper, and his exceptional resemblance to his father prompted her recognition. As the protagonist in *Notturmo indiano*, and Ryan in “Tema del traidor y del héroe,” Athos plays the role of the detective, having to investigate and solve a mystery: Draifa wants to know who murdered her lover. Athos Jr.’s murder investigation turns into a frustrating quest for his father’s identity. The film’s uncanny strategies of doubling and mirroring—which repeat, in a medium-specific context, Borges’s own strategies of repetition in “Tema del traidor y del héroe”—show that Athos’s search in the labyrinthine streets of Tara is turned both outward and inward. Athos’s quest involves the identity of the son, as well as that of the father.⁴¹ In conversations with his father’s former comrades (Gaibazzi, Rasori, and Costa), Athos Jr. is told that his father was not a hero killed by the fascists but, like Borges’s Kilpatrick, an informant, who revealed his friends’ plot to murder Mussolini to the fascist authorities. These friends tell Athos Jr. that when they discovered his father’s treason, Athos Sr. himself convinced them to kill him and blame the fascists, thus casting himself as a martyr for the cause he had just betrayed, in fact exploiting his betrayal as the springboard for a more enduring vengeance against the regime.

Though Athos’s journey of discovery is a quest for the father, the redundant city of Tara reiterates the absence of the father, in both concrete and symbolic terms. The popular song that accompanies Athos’s entrance in Tara is “Bionda,” the story of an unwed teenage mother who combines the nostalgic memories of her childhood games with her father with the regret that her daughter will never know the man who abandoned them, and whom she should call *Papà*. The song’s present is a time of disillusionment, when the young mother confronts the failure of her father’s promises to marry her off when of age and her own daughter’s fatherlessness.⁴² Even in the context of this simple song, the *function* of the father is not at all straightforward. Across generations, the father’s presence evokes bliss and betrayal, his absence nostalgia as well as deception.

As he is seeking a place to stay, Athos realizes that in this strange town of old and bizarre people one of the very few youngsters is the innkeeper’s grandchild. His father, the boy explains, died in a car accident on November 11,

"il giorno di San Martino," the feast day of Martin of Tours, the jolly guardian saint of winemakers and innkeepers. This apparently superfluous piece of information contributes to the condensed redundancy regarding the pregnant void at the core of *La strategia del ragno*. Martin, in fact, betrays the promise of merry celebration associated with his anniversary day. Instead of enjoying the profit of the harvest season and the life-giving warmth of the Indian summer, the innkeeper's family suffers the loss of its paterfamilias. Furthermore, in two scenes in the film the boy recites Giovanni Pascoli's "La cavalla storna," a poem narrating how the family mare brought home the body of Pascoli's father, murdered en route by a man who remained unidentified and unpunished in spite of the Pascolis' suspicions about who committed the crime. Just as in *Ossessione*, the topos of the murder of the Father pervades the film, but if in *Ossessione* Visconti exploited this motif in a parodic vein, in *La strategia del ragno* this theme remains ambivalent in the variety of its references. For example, echoes from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*—a thread from Borges's own intertextual web—mark the first conversation between Athos Jr. and Draifa:

"They were all in cahoots. In the meantime, they never found the murderer. The cops found an anonymous letter on him, still sealed. They opened it and the letter said that he would die if he went to the theatre."

"Like Julius Caesar."

"Who?"

"Julius Caesar, before going to the Senate."

"Just like Athos. Same thing. Another strange fact."

"Another legend?"

"A Gypsy. She read his palm and foretold his death."

"Macbeth: the witch of the prophecy."

"You must have read a lot."⁴³

Both Macbeth and Julius Caesar, like Athos, received predictions of their impending death, but if Macbeth was the traitor who plotted against the good father (King Duncan) and murdered him to satisfy his ambition, Julius Caesar was a far more ambivalent figure in Shakespeare's play. On Shakespeare's stage, unlike that of Vespasiano's Sabbioneta, Julius Caesar is not a univocally readable figure, and the tragic pathos results from the fact that Caesar is both the murdered father of Rome, whose death sank the republic into civil war, *and* the tyrant who betrayed the ideals of democracy upon which this very repub-



Figure 8.5. Athos Magnani Jr. (Giulio Brogi) and the inscribed bust of his father. Photo-fest/New Work Films. Photo used by permission.

lic had been founded. In turn, the tragedy's "other," Brutus (Caesar's adopted son), is the ambivalent mirror image of Caesar himself, a hero and traitor at once, as Borges knew well when evoking this Shakespearean character.

Absent as a physical figure, Athos Sr. pervades the present of Tara, just as Vespasiano filled Sabbioneta's. Athos lives on, in effigy and by proxy—a ghostly sign of what was once a man. In snapshots, individual memories and collective narratives, statues, names of institutions, road signs, and inscriptions, Tara's civic signposts exhibit the townspeople's emotional involvement with one of the most traumatic moments of their recent past. "Athos Magnani, hero vilely killed by fascist bullets," reads the inscription below Athos's bust in the main piazza (fig. 8.5).⁴⁴ The murder of the innocent, an event endowed with too much emotional meaning because of its traumatic impact, has *stayed* with the town, dictating its choices and actions and building its public identity after the fall of the regime.⁴⁵ As Draifa tells Athos Jr.: "The movies, the telephone, the milking machine, and television have made it to Tara.

It's all appearance. In our town, everything stopped the day of his death."⁴⁶ This momentous and tragic incident has altered the experience of linear time, blocking the calendar on the date of June 15, 1936. Tara therefore exists in an ambivalent temporal dimension: its recent history imbues the present to such a degree that it creates a paradoxical *past that does not pass*, a past that the town obsessively repeats and collectively restages. Tara's civic identity is a sum of the memories, fears, and desires that, upon the ghost of that traumatic fact—Athos's alleged cowardly murder by the fascists—have determined the way in which Tara defines itself in the *dopoguerra* ("postwar period"). In this walled city of circular time the weight of the past dictates the way the present *manufactures* and *re-presents* this very past.⁴⁷ The past overdetermines the present, and the present compulsively repeats identical images of that constructed past, thus overdetermining it in turn. The result is a balanced and chiasitic time, a crisscross temporal structure that defies chronology and becoming. This chiasitic time, neither fully present nor entirely past, but uncannily double, generates Athos Sr.'s *simulacrum*—an image woven on the loom of memory and loss, and displayed on a city-stage that reflects it in the many emblems of its fictive topography.

Like Vespasiano's Sabbioneta, Tara's theatricality uncovers the artificiality of this past and the constructed nature of Athos's identity. The staged referent in Tara is no longer the imagined world of imperial Rome (a world that would have suited fascist propaganda) but that of Verdi's operas, namely *Ernani* (1844), *Attila* (1846), *Rigoletto* (1851), *Il trovatore* (1853), and *Un ballo in maschera* (1859). Verdi was the emblem of the Risorgimento struggles for Italian national identity and freedom from foreign rule. The second Risorgimento and the *Resistenza* movement turned to Verdi's mystique to revamp the spirit of the wars of independence. In *La strategia del ragno* references to these operas not only furnish dramatic backdrops and convenient parallels to the film's events; they also reveal how the film "is also about the manufacturing of a myth, and the mythic repertoire to which the film's characters turn is that of Verdi's operas; the forum in which they see themselves acting out these events is his operatic stage" (Crisp and Hillman 253).⁴⁸ As Gaibazzi confesses to Athos Jr., his antifascism, like that of his two comrades, was inspired by "*Ernani* . . . , Samuel e Tom, *Un ballo in maschera*" more than by actual historical awareness and ideological engagement: "We were antifascists and perhaps we didn't even know what it meant. We had no programs at all. . . . We imagined we were one of those characters, you see. But we didn't understand

anything—nothing at all. Nothing at all, I tell you. Not like your father. He was something else. Your father was . . . very different, because he knew what he . . . Charming. When we listened to him speak, so cultured, so prepared.”⁴⁹ If Costa, Gaibazzi, and Rasori can only make sense of history through the filter of the popular operas they know, Athos Sr. is a more creative interpreter of this dramatic culture. He exploits it to bestow mythical breadth upon his historical actions, just as Vespasiano did with the memories of imperial Rome, and Borges’s James Nolan with the Swiss *Festspiele* and Shakespeare’s plays.

Athos enlists his friends to carry out the assassination of Mussolini during the Duce’s visit to Tara to attend a performance of *Rigoletto* in the newly opened theater.⁵⁰ The four conspirators plan to kill the Duce when Rigoletto discovers that, by being the unwitting abettor of his daughter’s death, he has disastrously fulfilled the curse cast on him by the wronged Monterone. Mussolini’s murder is thus endowed with all the dramatic inexorableness of a righteous revenge, sung in the famous notes of “Ah la maledizione,” but deprived of the pathos of the innocent victim’s sacrifice, as was the case with Gilda. However, the anonymous phone call informing the fascist authorities about the plot spares Mussolini’s life and lifts the vengeful curse that drove *Rigoletto*’s action to its tragic denouement. The historical plot lacks the inexorable teleological drive of its operatic counterpart and is left open to questions and doubt. Who informed Mussolini of the murder plot? Why was Mussolini spared? When Athos’s friends discover his betrayal, and thus answer at least the first question, Athos seizes the opportunity to fabricate an answer for the second one by refashioning history according to another archetypal “revenge” theme. This time the theme is that of a betrayal perpetrated to exact a more enduring retribution, as employed in Verdi’s *Attila*.

An excerpt from *Attila*’s musical score accompanies the camera as it approaches the bust of Athos Magnani, with the inscription denouncing his murder. Bertolucci thus connects Athos to the opera’s protagonist, Odabella. Odabella is the daughter of the lord of Aquileia, whose realm has been invaded by the Huns, who killed him. The night before Attila’s planned invasion of Rome, Odabella, who is a prisoner in the Hun’s camp, warns Attila of the poison that her lover, Foresto, has placed in his cup. Accused of betrayal, she defends herself, arguing that she plans to carry out a more spectacular vengeance, and proceeds to stab Attila to death.⁵¹ Combining the role assigned to Odabella (minus the successful murder of the tyrant) with those of operatic victims such as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and especially Lenora in *Il trovatore*, Athos

emplots his betrayal of the antifascist cause into an instrument of self-sacrifice in order to obtain an enduring justice. As in "Tema del traidor y del héroe," history is refashioned as drama and performed according to the conventions and leitmotifs of the operatic canon: self-sacrifice, loyalty, conspiracy, betrayal, murder, and revenge.

As *La strategia del ragno* displays the collective effort to cast Athos Sr. in this dramatic role, Athos Jr.'s quest both follows and unwrites this very effort, while other citations from Verdi complicate the univocal interpretability of the film's operatic referents. At the core of *La strategia del ragno* there is a question that Athos Jr. poses to Draifa in the very middle of the film: "How was he more intimately?"⁵² Draifa's strange answer turns Platonic repetition into its Nietzschean double and the ideal city of Sabbioneta into the uncanny dream-world of Tara. If the symbolism of Vespasiano's Sabbioneta was eminently readable—Vespasiano posing as the copy of solid models such as Aeneas and Augustus—Draifa's memories present Athos as the ambiguous reflection of an ambivalent symbol, in a context marred with duplicity and betrayal.

Draifa's reply consists in her recounting her last romantic rendezvous with Athos Sr. Bertolucci stages these memories as a cinematic flashback: we see Draifa and Athos Sr. in the intimate space of a bedroom, as they lightheartedly tease and bully each other. Suddenly, having resented an implicitly unfavorable comparison to his wife, Draifa slaps Athos in the face and tells him that she is no longer able to be the "other" woman: "Take my picture because this is the last time you see me. . . . I want to have [a] normal New Year's Eve. My New Year's Eve is at eleven o'clock because at midnight you must go to your wife. I want to sleep with you, wake up with you, I want to get bored with you, eat with you."⁵³ Bertolucci creates such a melodramatic sense of an ending only to undermine it, visually. He organizes the filmic sequence as a series of back-and-forth cuts from Draifa and Athos Sr. in the bedroom to Draifa and Athos Jr. as they walk alongside the cornfields and poplar woods toward Draifa's home. The bedroom scene presents a tightly framed space, replete with wall and armoire mirrors. The bedroom's closed door and curtained window feature, respectively, a grid design and iron bars that evoke the captivity of a prison cell. Draifa, in a white nightgown, and Athos in his undershirt and red bandanna, double themselves in their reflections as Draifa wraps a tight bandage around Athos's waist to alleviate a back injury (fig. 8.6). By having Draifa circle, spiderlike, around Athos as she holds one end of the bandage, and Athos spin around himself to help her wrap him up, Bertolucci creates a



Figure 8.6. The mise-en-scène and the movements of the two actors emphasize entrapment and circular time.

sense of self-enclosed circularity, of redundant repetition of the same movement that undermines both Draifa's ultimatum and Athos's ensuing promise: "Things will change, you'll see, they'll change."⁵⁴ Dialogue and mise-en-scène thus conjure up a circular space of static ambivalence, of time brought to a halt, where tenderness coexists with violence (both suffered and inflicted), mirth with pain, mutual dependence with betrayal, and obsessive reiteration of sameness with intimations of imminent yet ever deferred change.

Interrupted by a cut to the present that sees Draifa faint in the high corn, the bedroom scene turns into a spectacle that has all the intensity of a nightmare. The camera engages in a slow circling motion around the room (one of the film's many such movements, reminiscent of the cinema of Max Ophüls) and stops on Draifa, as she opens the shutters and looks through the bars of the bedroom window.⁵⁵ Under the fugue of porticoes below the Galleria degli Antichi a toddler plays with toy trains. His mother runs toward him and carries him to safety as shouts in German herald a surreal circus scene. Three lion tamers perform a strange act, using sticks and whips to control the move-

ments of an unseen beast. A series of cuts to close-ups of Athos—who is anxiously spying on the scene from inside the window bars—and a roaring lion establishes a connection between them, though its meaning remains unclear. From the far end of the portico a group of people runs toward the lion tamers carrying a black sheet floating over their heads. At this point Draifa in the white nightgown, rather than Draifa regaining consciousness after passing out in the cornfield, addresses the camera (and implicitly as well as anachronistically, the audience of her recollection, that is, Athos Jr.) and states: “It might have been fear, it might have been because he had his back turned, so that I was unable to see his face, but I knew it was all over. Really. That was the last time, the last time that I saw him alive.”⁵⁶ This temporal dislocation creates an impossible experiential space, one in which Draifa shares information that would become available to her only at a later time (“It was the last time, the last time that I saw him alive”). To put it differently, Draifa, here, is a chronological hybrid and does not inhabit the linear time of history. This scene rather evokes the condensed time of dreams and functions according to their counterlogic. Appropriately, this double Draifa furnishes a convincing interpretative key to the baffling circus scene, when she argues that it was fear that made her understand that it was all over.

Where is Draifa's fear coming from? One could argue that fear is the appropriate response to the danger that the escaped lion poses to all defenseless people (as represented by the young boy at play), but this does not explain the connection (either by cause or effect) between her fear and her realization that “it was all over” with Athos. Draifa's fear is the effect of the circus scene's *Unheimlichkeit*. As pointed out earlier, according to Freud, the uncanny is not merely the fear caused by the *unfamiliar* (as the sudden appearance of a lion in a makeshift playground in the *bassa padana*) but also the horror inspired by something that generally remains hidden but is suddenly exposed and brought to light. In this staged and stylized circus scene, what remains concealed to the workings of causal thought but reemerges as the return of the repressed is the complex analogical bond between Athos and the escaped lion.⁵⁷ What is, then, the hidden secret that Athos and the lion share, which provokes Draifa's terror? Obviously, it cannot be their strength alone that causes fear, given Draifa's spirited dealings with Athos in the bedroom scene. The *trait-d'union* between Athos and the lion is a shared ambivalence. This ambivalence, in tune with Freud's reading of the uncanny, provokes the cognitive uncertainty that heralds the feeling of anxiety.

Traditionally, the lion is an emblem of male power, dignity, and courage, as expressed, as we have seen, by the Bohemian lion in the Gonzaga emblem. The king of all animals is also a symbol of justice, and in Christian times it became a representation of Jesus and of his resurrection (“the Lion of the tribe of Judah” in Revelation 5:5). But the Bible also compares Satan to a lion that “sits in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places he murders the innocent; his eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless. He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den” (Psalms 10:8–11). Pride, ambition, and treacherous concealment are the features of this lion, which, as the Shakespeare of *Julius Caesar* knew well, is often associated with the leader who, having forgotten justice and the common good, surreptitiously plots to achieve arbitrary glory and personal gain.

It has been widely noted that in the context of fascist popular culture the self-identification with a lion was part of Mussolini’s personal mythmaking, as demonstrated by his motto “better one day as a lion than one hundred years as a sheep” (Crisp and Hillman 259). Mussolini also enjoyed portraying himself as a lion tamer. Photographs from the early 1920s show him in a cage with a lion, and a Pirelli ad features him in the passenger seat of a car with a lion on his lap.⁵⁸ In these examples Mussolini either identifies himself with the lion’s might or submits that very power to his own will. *La strategia del ragno* imbues the allegory of the lion with contradictory implications. Sultano, as the exotic animal is appropriately albeit mockingly named, is all but regal and free. It is part of a well-rehearsed circus act, and the German tamers use the tools of their trade to keep its might within the precinct of spectacular yet harmless self-display. Sultano’s sole act of rebellion turns out to be short-lived and self-destructive, as we later learn, when Gaibazzi explains how Sultano died of a stress-induced fever soon after being recaptured. Perhaps following Shakespeare’s use of the lion imagery in *Julius Caesar*, all references to this majestic symbol carry contradictory traits: power implies weakness; sovereignty entails captivity; and courage involves cowardice. In a significant manipulation of the Duce’s self-serving mythmaking, Sultano can be seen as the Mussolini who is about to fall under the black pall of his German ally. Meaningfully, the lion scene occurs under the archways below the Galleria degli Antichi, the celebratory domain where Vespasiano had assembled the symbols devoted to preserving the Gonzaga mythical and historical lineage according to the laws of Platonic repetition. Counterpart to the Galleria degli Antichi, this opaque space turns Vespasiano’s logocentric and foundational epistemology upside

down, subverting it with the uncanny rules of ambiguity and "intellectual uncertainty."

In the following sequence Athos Jr. falls asleep in a lawn chair, as Draifa busies herself preparing a meal in her garden. In the next scene we see Athos Jr. sitting at the table, with Gaibazzi, Rasori, and Costa. Grim Agenore Beccaccia, the local landowner and former fascist *gerarca*, is an unwelcome guest at the jolly meal. The ringing of a telephone followed by a southern-inflected voice repeating the word "Pronto?" (Hello?) merge with Gaibazzi's imitation of a turtle dove. The convivial scene mixes the three friends' amused remembrances of juvenile pranks against the regime with statements of hostility toward the mummylike Beccaccia. The scatological nature of these remembered pranks and the multiple toasts add a mock-heroic and carnivalesque quality to the scene. Suddenly, an irate Rasori confronts Beccaccia with an apparently absurd statement: he claims that he, Costa, and Gaibazzi have eaten a lion, but Beccaccia never has: "Un leone, tu, tu, io, ma voi, un leone, tu non l'hai mangiato mai" ("A lion, you, you, and I, but you, you have never eaten a lion"). The implication, underscored by the shift from the fascist *voi* to the vaguely debasing familiar *tu*, is that this act involves virtues and beliefs that a fascist could not aspire to possess. Furthermore, the bizarre act of eating the lion and the story of Sultano's death are connected, as it is here that Gaibazzi reminisces about Sultano's untimely demise.

At this point, the scene shifts to a medium shot of Gaibazzi leading a peculiar procession, while intoning the *Miserere* from Verdi's *Il trovatore*. Behind him, two waiters carry an elaborately decorated platter containing a lion's head, an apple in its mouth. As they march according to the solemn tempo of the *Miserere*, the waiters resemble pall-bearers, and the lion myth acquires new connotations. Besides Verdi's famed opera, the *Miserere* recalls the incipit to Psalm 51, a liturgical song of repentance that is associated with the sacrament of confession and with the acts of contrition and penance performed during the ceremonies of Ash Wednesday. As a reference to *Il trovatore*, Gaibazzi's rendition of *Miserere* blends in with a recording of Lenora's aria "Quel son, quelle preci solenni" ("That sound, those solemn prayers"). The musical allusion emphasizes the concepts of death and self-sacrifice, as this is the point in the opera when Lenora offers her own life to save her beloved Manrico.

In another temporal dislocation, as the waiters place the platter onto the dinner table, the man receiving this strange offering is Athos Sr., whom we see holding a glass of red wine. The same alternate close-ups on Athos's face at the

lion repeat the “recognition” scene in Draifa’s bedroom. Turned from predator to prey, this “sacrificial lion,” which has given itself *in pasto* to the human world, has replaced the proverbial lamb as an offering in a ceremony that in the solemn notes of the *Miserere* speaks of sacrificial death while asking forgiveness and purification from one’s sins. The dinner scene, with its sacrificial aura and emphasis on the eating of the lion by the worthy disciples, recalls the Last Supper, albeit with mocking debasement. The circus lion that ends up with the proverbial forbidden fruit in its mouth cannot seriously stand for Christ and his sacrifice. The scene’s parodic overtones, with its emphasis on food and feasting, and the reversal of the lion myth and the regal authority that it traditionally implies, have no Lenten qualities. The scene rather evokes all the carnivalesque absurdity of a world upside down: a world where opposites coexist, a world of sheer ambivalence, where lions are the uncanny counterparts of lambs.

In this context one must ask whether the Judas figure is, indeed, only Beccaccia, the obvious bad guy who did not partake of the meal (as the three friends seem eager to state at meal’s end when they tell Beccaccia that he must confess to committing Athos’s murder). How to explain the presence of Athos Sr., who sits alone at the dinner table when the lion is served? Since he partakes of the eating of the lion, Athos Sr. is one of the worthy disciples, eager to become one with the lion, according to the participative repetition of the Christian myth. However, “becoming one with the lion” is the problematic act here. If this act implies a process of Platonic repetition that fulfills itself in the assumption of Christ’s identity, in this case this identity partakes of the fundamental ambivalence of the emblem because “Judas is somehow a reflection of Jesus” (Borges, “Three Versions” 164).⁵⁹ One should recall, here, that in another meaningful condensation this scene began with the ringing phone that, as becomes clear only later on in the film, was the call that Athos Sr. placed to the *carabinieri* (traditionally southerners serving in the North, hence the clue of the accent) to betray his friends’ plot to kill Mussolini. In this context Gaibazzi’s spirited singing of Renato’s aria “Eri tu” (“It was you”), from act 3 of *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), suggests a disturbing ambivalence between the two alleged polar opposites: Beccaccia (as stand-in for Mussolini himself) and Athos Sr. The lines that Gaibazzi addresses to a stock-still Beccaccia are in fact those that Renato sings as he looks at a portrait of the count who seduced his wife: “Eri tu che macchiavi quell’anima, la delizia dell’anima mia” (“It was you who stained that soul, the delight of my life”). While, as Crisp and Hill-

man point out, this line suggests that Beccaccia and fascism in general "poisoned their lives" (259), it may also hint at the nefarious hold that the fascist *gerarca* may have had on a too-pliable antifascist leader. Both antagonists and mirror images, Beccaccia and Athos Sr. double one another via the theme of betrayal, possibly mandated by one and committed by the other.

Fear—the *paura* that connotes Draifa's uncanny representation of how Athos was "more intimately"—marks three other scenes where the oneiric component is prominent and the definition of Athos Sr.'s identity is engaged directly. The first scene follows Athos Jr.'s visit to the *Circolo Culturale Giovanile Athos Magnani*, an *osteria* where he gets drunk with the elderly patrons, in an ambiance of juvenile remarks and sexual/scatological jokes that foreshadows the dinner at Draifa's. As Athos rests his face on the table and, supposedly, falls asleep, the scene switches to the piazza, bathed in blue colors. The piazza has a structure in the middle, which resembles a circus pedestal, and anticipates by analogy the lion episode. After sharing a slice of watermelon with a caged rabbit, Athos enters a building. The door shuts with a bang, caging him in turn in an enveloping darkness. Athos strikes a match, which illuminates a painting of the Virgin Mary. Perplexed, Athos walks further into the building, approaches a horse, and asks, "Did you know my father, too? Is it true that we were exactly alike?"⁶⁰

Although the scene has all the absurdity of a drunken dream, it also echoes the setting and context of "La cavalla storna," where the Pascolis' mare was the silent keeper of the terrible secret that Pascoli's mother wanted revealed on behalf of her "figlio giovinetto" ("young son"). In *La strategia del ragno* the secret to uncover, as in Pascoli's poem, is who murdered the father and why. Athos Jr. understands well that the answer to these questions may furnish a glimpse into Athos Sr.'s identity. Posed under the watchful eyes of the Ur-Mother, Athos Jr.'s query regarding his resemblance to his father—a query that implies the definition of his own selfhood—occurs in a context that ironically reverses the father-lion symbolism, intended in its traditional absolutizing value. If the implicit analogy between the son and the caged rabbit carries connotations of fearfulness, vulnerability, and even cowardice in an Italian cultural context, the son-rabbit identification with the father-lion infuses the allegory of the lion with shifting and ambivalent values.⁶¹ Once again, the secret of the uncanny rests on the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*, in a domain where the mirror of identity turns out to be difference and the mirror of difference identity. Significantly, it is at this point that Athos experiences a

violent anxiety attack, and he starts banging on the barn's door, demanding to be freed.

The next uncontrollable experience of fear occurs after Athos goes to the local theater to meet Beccaccia, who scornfully tells him that, unfortunately, the fascists did not have the "pleasure to murder his father." When he leaves the theater, Athos hears Gaibazzi honking his car's horn, and accepts a ride. As they drive out of town toward the Po River, Athos grows progressively uncomfortable and sick to this stomach, as Gaibazzi presses him: "Tell the truth, you want to know the truth, don't you? . . . You want to know the truth. Your father said the truth means nothing. Only the consequences of the truth matter. The truth matters nothing."⁶²

As Gaibazzi stops the car, Athos gets out, leans against a tree, and dizzily walks toward Rasori and Costa (one may recall here Borges's "vertigo"). Rasori and Costa are waiting near the abandoned moving van where the four comrades had planned the plot against Mussolini in 1936. In a repetition of an identical scene with Athos Sr. thirty years before, Costa and Rasori bang the sides of the van with sticks. As he sees them performing this inexplicable and aggressive gesture, Athos panics and runs away into the poplar woods, as the music from *Attila* starts. As he tells Draifa later: "I got scared and ran away."⁶³ Lesley Caldwell describes and interprets the sequence with admirable precision:

In the first shot . . . it is the son, in the last the father, who in turn, run off into the bushes. In between the camera alternates rapidly for the first five shots between top half and legs of son, switches to father at shot six, back to son for seven, to father for eight, nine, ten, to son at eleven, and to father for the last three. The shot is from son, to an alternation, to a concentration on the father. The cutting is so rapid that it conveys both a confusion between father and son and an ambiguity about who is chasing whom or running from whom. (233)

The sequence constitutes a masterful visual rendition not only of the interlacing of identities but also of linear and circular temporality in *La strategia del ragno*. Athos Jr.'s journey of discovery is both progressive and regressive, and it results in a back-and-forth movement from past to present and from present to past—a combination of running away and running in place, so to speak. This hybrid temporal territory—a chronotope inhabited by fear—belongs to neither the time of the father nor that of the son exclusively. It is an engulfing time-space set "in-between," in the uncanny *Zeitraum* that their

opaque similarity crosses (repeating, thus, the same chronotope defining the "hybrid" Draifa of the bedroom scene): Athos Jr. here becomes "the father he is trying to destroy" (Wicks 28).⁶⁴ As Peter Bondanella points out: "While the figure of Athos attempts to run out of the camera frame, the camera's movement imprisons him, and the background of the figure in the frame—the straight, leafless poplar trees so typical of river beds in Emilia-Romagna—cannot help but suggest to the viewer the confining bars of a prison" ("Borges, Bertolucci" 9).

The fear that Athos and his "double" feel results from their shared experience of witnessing the same, repeated, act: Rasori's and Costa's hitting the van with sticks. Besides being associated by analogy with the sticks that the circus tamers used to control the escaped lion, these sticks, and the violence associated with them, recall the infamous fascist *manganelli* and thus establish an unsettling similarity between the acts of violence planned and perpetrated on both sides of the political divide.⁶⁵ The fear and the urge to run away constitute the emotional response of this double Athos to the bloodshed he himself advocated: "None of us is enough of a marksman to be sure to kill him with the first shot. I mean, mathematically sure. . . . The moral: a slow fuse, a detonator, a stick of dynamite. Midnight. Applause. Light the fuse! Boom Boom."⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, Athos must concede that a bomb in the theater is bound to harm many innocent victims, besides killing Mussolini, and this reason alone may explain his about-face. However, by later preventing what they all see as a rightful murder, and revealing where the bomb is hidden with an anonymous call to the *carabinieri*, Athos betrays the antifascist ideals he had embraced, while protecting his fellow conspirators' identities. On the practical realm of political action this ethical conundrum defines the "intellectual uncertainty" that, in broader epistemological terms, we have seen as the mark of the uncanny.⁶⁷

The final episode of fear constitutes the film's climax. Athos is at the train station, once again determined to leave town, but the opening notes of *Rigoletto* call him back, drawing him toward the core of the uncanny, Tara's theater. In a spectacular mise en abyme, Athos finds himself to be the protagonist of the play that reenacts the staged murder of his father.⁶⁸ Just as in Borges's Swiss *Festspiele* or Vespasiano's Renaissance spectacles, the entire town functions as a film set.⁶⁹ There are spectators, such as two old men standing on chairs, to get closer to the loudspeakers hanging from buildings and trees and playing the Duke's aria "Questa o quella" ("This one or that one"). There is

a chorus, with two old women, repeating, in stilted and memorized Italian, built on the cadences and syntactical structure of the local dialect, the references to the letter and the gypsy's prediction from, respectively, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* announcing the hero's death, thus adding a sense of staged foreboding to the scene.

Athos enters the theater. Surprisingly, for the referential accuracy of much of the film, the theater's interior is not Scamozzi's *teatro all'antica*—the center of Vespasiano's own political spectacle—but a typical nineteenth-century opera house, a *teatro all'italiana* with rows of balconies replacing Scamozzi's *cavea*. Tara's theater thus highlights its cinematic artifice, while emphasizing its connection to the great season of the nineteenth-century Italian *melodramma*. Athos Jr. sits in one of the balconies, listening to the same opera that his father had heard thirty years before. Gaibazzi, Rasori, and Costa are in the box opposite his. As the music reaches its climax, "in a series of virtuoso pulled focus shots the camera cuts between them and [Athos] as one friend after another leaves the box" (Caldwell 236). The third time, the box opposite Athos's is empty and Athos, his fear growing with the intensity of the music, sees the three men reflected in the mirror on the wall of his box. Repeating his father's actions, Athos turns toward the stage and away from the box's door as Rigoletto sings, "Ah la maledizione." Applause follows, as the death onstage (that of Gilda, the innocent victim) echoes that in the balcony.

Athos Jr.'s discovery of "the truth," that his father had been executed by his best friends according to a script he himself had carefully invented for them, occurs (Borges-like) on a dizzyingly artificial stage, a play within a play. In this "anniversary" reenactment, this game of self-reflecting mirrors and doubled scenarios, time is no longer linear but self-contained and circular, like the walls of Tara. As he reenacts his father's actions, however, Athos Jr. does not reach a Platonic, essential core, a foundational truth. The original motives for Athos Sr.'s act of betrayal remain as opaque and labyrinthine as ever, stretching from the extreme of sheer cowardice to that of moral concern for the death of innocent victims, and so does his "true nature." All Athos Jr. can reproduce is a staged life, based on the conventional themes of Italian operas. Athos Jr., in other words, relives a self-conscious fiction built on the themes of betrayal, self-sacrifice, and lasting vengeance, which, in turn, is the subtext of another grand political spectacle, that of the Blackshirts' alleged assassination of the antifascist hero. In the theater of Tara Athos experiences, by reenacting it, how his father turned his life into two well-made plots, with coinciding

spectacular endings: "the truth," Bertolucci argued with an obvious wink to Borges, "is precisely the theatrical *mise-en-scène*" (Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 61): "*La vida es el libreto.*"⁷⁰

Each of these denouements gave Athos Sr.'s life meaning. Repeating Borges, at the core of this story, however, there is the empty, pregnant ambivalence, that unfamiliar-known that is the uncanny, the kernel that escapes appropriation and definition but can only be staged, represented, yet cannot be explained away. If explanation fails, on the anniversary of his father's death, Athos (like Borges's Ryan) needs to decide which of the two emplotments available to him survives the test of time—which historical narrative, in other words, has the strongest proleptic power. For many Italians born in the twentieth century, Verdi's operas have lost the ability to translate themselves into political calls to arms. Like the fictional theater of Tara, they are the emblem of a glorious yet relatively brief season, stretching from the wars of Independence to the second Risorgimento. The historical boundaries of this season are made stridently clear by the cinematic superimposition of Tara's incongruous *teatro all'italiana* into the otherwise pure Renaissance architecture of Sabbioneta. In this sense we become self-consciously aware of "the transmission, loss, and transmutation of values, traditions, and myths as one generation is replaced by another, one culture by another" (Matteo 18). At the same time, the honorable struggle of the heroes of the Italian *Resistenza* against the fascist dictatorship is portrayed as an equally constructed fable, "a comfortable illusion consciously created by man and employed to manipulate political opinion" (Bondanella, "Borges, Bertolucci" 12–13). In Tara's grand *teatro di posa*, the antidictatorial myth of Athos Magnani, "hero vilely killed by fascist bullets," which founds Tara's postwar collective identity, reveals as in a palimpsest the underlying, and divergent, autocratic fable of the historical Vespasiano Gonzaga, the founder of a new Rome. In their difference the two urban spaces of Sabbioneta and Tara are uncannily similar in that both are ideological constructs, human-made artifacts and staged scenarios set in the opaque land between history and myth.

Bertolucci's conclusive sequence repeats the setting of the film's beginning, thus emphasizing Tara's circular and self-enclosed chronotope. Athos is, once again, at the train station, this time ready to leave town. However, the train for Parma is late, twenty minutes at first, according to the loudspeaker's announcement. The delay increases to thirty-five minutes. A tracking shot of the deserted railroad shows that weeds have covered the tracks. The experience

of time is both disjointed and unnatural here. While the clock realistically monitors the extent of the train's delay, the slow camera movement on the grass that first barely touches and then engulfs the tracks suggests a different chronology altogether.⁷¹ This chronology is ambivalent in itself: while provoking an unrealistic compression of experience (how much time has elapsed: minutes or months?) it also evokes the abolition of human time altogether—Chronos swallowed up by timeless Nature. Bertolucci's inconsistent representation of time, with its splitting, or doubling, of chronological experiences, is exquisitely uncanny. This uncanniness, in turn, heightens and is heightened by the impression of being "buried alive" (one of the most primitive causes of uncanny feelings according to Freud). The labyrinth of Tara—this "kingdom of the Dead" in Bertolucci's own words—allows no liberation and no exit (Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 52). A long shot of the immemorial and remote townscape of Tara—motionless under the unchanging blue sky—and an increasingly ominous music bring the feeling of anxiety to a paroxysmal climax, before the final fade-to-black.

If Bertolucci generates a powerful sense of the uncanny in his last train station scene, he simultaneously lays bare the techniques and technologies that define this scene as a self-consciously *cinematic* domain. *La strategia del ragno's* ending repeats the setting of its beginning. Besides the lack of referential counterpart (just as there is no *teatro all'italiana*, there is no train station in Sabbioneta), the two train station sequences evoke a circular space that underscores their artifice through strategies of self-citation, intermediality, and mise en abyme. Athos's uncanny doppelgänger, the mysterious sailor who appears at the beginning and end of *La strategia del ragno*, is a *revenant* from Bertolucci's *La commare secca* (*The Grim Reaper*, 1962). The arrival of the train that opens the film (fig. 8.7) cannot but recall Louis Lumière's *L'arrivée du train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) or (in the United States) Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) or the Biograph Company's *Empire State Express* (1919), which so elated and astonished early film audiences. The handcar at the end of the film, absurd in its role of servicing an abandoned railroad, is another tongue-in-cheek quotation of a cinematic stock image, often recurring in early westerns and crime dramas, as well as in comedies and animated cartoons.⁷² Just as Borges's complex structure of nesting stories underscores his sophisticated narrative technique, so does Bertolucci create his own peculiar form of mise en abyme to evoke the technology of filmmaking. As he playfully put it in a 1970 interview: "I can't help being ironic—there is the novel



Figure 8.7. The arrival of a train in Tara.

in the novel and there is the railroad in the railroad because it's with a tracking shot that we shoot the railroad and so the tracking shot is of itself because it shows the rails which disappear under the grass" (Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 57).

The image of the rails that have almost but not quite disappeared under the thick grass is, indeed, a metaphor for the film as a whole, which pauses at the ambivalent threshold between illusion and self-revelation or realism and formalism. Bertolucci, like Borges and Freud before him, evokes the mystery of the uncanny and demands that his audience share the suppression of disbelief that allows participation in the story's emotions, while lifting a bit of the curtain, so to speak, to offer a glimpse of the medium-specific technologies that have constructed these uncanny scenarios.

In "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Films and the Incredulous Spectator" Tom Gunning notes that the emotional wavering caused by the cinematic "mix of realistic and non-realistic qualities" in early films defined the new attraction as uniquely capable of creating uncanny effects (117). Concen-

trating on the reception of early films in Russia and the United States, Yuri Tsivian writes:

The trains of the Lumières' films . . . became legendary not only for frightening the audiences, but also because, having caused the havoc, they disappeared into thin air. Such disappearing figures turned the foreground of the screen into an uncanny kind of "black hole," swallowing up everything that came near it. . . . A strange life is being enacted before you, and it's real, alive, bustling. . . . And suddenly, it vanishes. There's just a piece of white cloth in a wide, black frame, and it doesn't look as if there had been anything on it at all. . . . It gives you a strange, eerie feeling. (181–82)

Bertolucci's masterful evocation of these cinematic archetypes at the beginning and end of *La strategia del ragno* emphasizes his awareness of the *uncanny* quality inherent in the cinematic experience as a whole, with its ability to put to the test all certainties about the primacy of presence and sureness of vision as guarantors of stable identity and univocal self-definition.

Ultimately, Athos cannot leave Tara because he is an integral part of Tara's flaunted artifice. By underscoring the film's metacinematic function in a way comparable to Borges's metanarrative allusions, Bertolucci asks his viewers to both participate in and estrange themselves from the uncanny product. If the uncanny turns out to be indefinable, the act of sharing *understanding* of the formal processes that evoke the uncanny is what grants us, with the author, a margin of hermeneutical freedom and emancipation and, through them, a measure of ethical responsibility with regard to our aesthetic experience.

In "Tema del traidor y del héroe" the primary author/narrator writes that what he claims is his fragmentary, unfinished, and unoriginal plot "already somehow justifies me" ("The Theme" 143).⁷³ I read Borges's use of the verb *to justify* in its etymological meaning of "makes me just," that is, as a claim of ethical accountability set within a framework of radical skepticism. Or, to accurately appropriate Ihab Hassan's terminology in a Borgesian hermeneutical framework, one can speak of a "secular neo-gnosticism" on Borges's (and Bertolucci's) part, in which attaining understanding does not mean penetrating the mysteries of the universe but simply exposing the workings of our mental constructs—our fictions: "I suppose that things are thus: We . . . have dreamed the world. We have dreamed it strong, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and secure in time; but we have allowed tenuous, eternal interstices of injustice [*sinrazón*] in its structure to demonstrate that it is false"

("Avatars" 115).⁷⁴ These interstices correspond to the *hiato* at the heart of "Tema del traidor y del héroe," the void at the core of Freud's "Das Unheimliche," and the simulacrum at the center of Bertolucci's cinematic Tara: the opaque space of *sinrazón* that challenges the structuring of thought according to the stark law of binary logic and the clear-cut principle of noncontradiction. In this context, *just* is the modern Daedalus who, having built the world's strange and often quirky architectures, freely shares the construction plans and technologies of representation that allow a glimpse into the mirror *image* of Asterion, the uncanny other in all of us. This reflection, which displaces and fissures the self-satisfied certainty of identity and sameness, represents what Hassan, paraphrasing William James, defines as a condition of "unfinished" or "pragmatic" pluralism (*The Postmodern Turn* 230). Exigent but without dogma, confident yet provisional, structured yet open to digression, this pluralism demands that we continue to ask the hermeneutical, political, and ethical queries that inspired, among other things, the cross-cultural encounters between the fictions and films analyzed in this book.

Afterword

The ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion. It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word.

HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *TRUTH AND METHOD*

The discipline of hermeneutics owes its name to Hermes, the Greek god whose principal function in classical mythology was to be the herald of the gods. In this role Hermes was a skilled messenger, adept at the craft of eloquence and the art of persuasion. By embodying the spirit of crossing-over, Hermes was a facilitator of dialogue and contact among different domains: he mediated between human beings and Olympian deities and, as *psychopomp*, between the living and the dead. He negotiated alliances and treaties, and delivered dreams to mortals, soliciting their interpretation. A patron of boundaries and of all who traveled across them, he was *hermeneus*—a translator who bridged the gap between familiarity and strangeness and promoted contact and understanding among distant peoples. In the painting featured on the cover of this book, Salvador Dalí represents Hermes as a figure in transition and transformation—a powerful symbol of transcendence and transgression. Hermes is a body in flight, displaying an almost liquid, rippled dynamism, a lightness that overcomes the boundaries of its own physicality. As he leaps forward, Hermes seems to shed the colorful threads of a being that is becoming, while simultaneously carrying forth the *vestiges* of a selfhood (a past, a tradition)

that defines him as he moves on, toward novel encounters. As Dali's Hermes demonstrates visually, understanding—the hermeneutical act—both carries forth *and* delivers itself from the discourses acquired and sifted from the past, while it projects itself forward. The figure of Hermes, then, can be said to represent the interpretive drive that is always receiving, deciphering, and *adapting stories* in order to find out how to best proceed as it engages in the very process of going on.

As a hermeneutical enterprise adaptation is an act of narrative understanding—understanding of products (*what* the interaction between a literary text and a film tells us) and understanding of processes and techniques (*how* the interaction between a literary text and a film creates meaning). Undoubtedly, like any other discursive system, literature and cinema each has its unique normative mechanisms. These mechanisms do not exist in a vacuum, however, but operate in accord (or confrontation) with other systems that disrupt the chimera of systemic autonomy and build a polyphonic, heterogeneous, and self-consciously citational discursive space. In the agoraic domain drafted in this book, the interpretation of literary and cinematic works occurred by examining these works' confluence and communication not only with one another but also with the sociocultural environments, historical traditions, and aesthetic practices of which they are integral parts. An adaptation cannot be intended as "an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities" but as a specific kind of interpretation that must "itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness" (Sontag, "Against" 7). The art of storytelling "has never really been as static as we like to think" (Harrison xvii): Stories do indeed travel, and the publication of a novel and the release of a film provide a partial closure at best. Stories find new media and new forms, build synergies, and create conflicts. I am not interested in offering the last word on the "nature" of an adaptive practice that exists in a state of historical transformation but in listening carefully to some of the questions posed by the encounter between specific literary and cinematic narratives.

As Erica Sheen points out in her introduction to *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen*: "Film has been around now for over a hundred years, so it is surprising that the nature of its relationship to literature is still an open question. Surprising, perhaps, only if we assume that intellectual disciplines evolve according to a teleology of definition" (1). Working in the field of "open questions" rather than of "normative models," the adaptations studied in *When*

Stories Travel have nevertheless addressed some of the prejudices attached to the relationship between film and literature. These prejudices include the assumptions that cinema cannot express the subtlety of point of view as well as the novel and that films are not endowed with “prose’s fluent dexterity for representing the present in relationship to the past” (Jonathan Miller 233). Furthermore, these prejudicial approaches contend that “packed symbolic thinking” and metaphorical language are prerogatives of literature, while cinema must content itself with mere “photographic images of physical reality” (Bluestone 22). All these prejudices are summarized neatly in George Bluestone’s claim that “with the abandonment of language as its sole and primary element, the film necessarily leaves behind those characteristic contents of thought which only language can approximate: tropes, dreams, memories, conceptual consciousness” (20).

Any of the adaptations included in *When Stories Travel* could be used as a case study to refute these claims. However, my primary goal in this book has not been to disprove this argument but rather to change this argument’s focus by posing different queries—queries that change the premises of the discussion regarding adaptation. To cite the unfortunate title of one of Seymour Chatman’s essays (a far more subtle essay than its title implies), the issue is not to find out what “novels can do that films can’t (and vice versa)” but rather to see what they can do both *individually* and *together*. Seen in this perspective, adaptation resists the static model based on “the ideology of the Original” (Cattrysse 18) and the “glorification of Adaptation as certified copy” of an established model (Fink 99). The adaptive journey “over and across systemic borders” and cultural frontiers (Tourey 1112; Cattrysse 12) is not linear at all but traces an itinerary of forking paths, crisscrossing lanes, and recursive patterns. With Edward Said, we can consider all adapted narratives as establishing “an order of repetition, not originality—but an eccentric order of repetition, not one of sameness.” In this context, Said explains, “the term *repetition* is used in order to avoid such dualities as ‘the original versus the derivative,’ . . . or ‘model/paradigm versus example’; and [the term] *eccentric* is used in order to emphasize the possibilities of difference within repetition” (*Beginnings* 12). The films, created in different cultural and historical formations compared to the literary works they adapt, intervene actively in the production of meaning, embarking on a journey that both repeats and changes the literary text while accepting the challenge of being changed in turn.

The domain of adaptation is not necessarily one of harmonious (if always

partial) synthesis—the golden mean between two extremes—but, rather, an *eccentric* and liminal space, the Nietzschean *in-between* where ambivalences thrive and opposites prosper. This is the locus where familiarity and strangeness, identity and otherness, and preservation and innovation coexist in a state of amalgam, rather than fusion, and where the debris left by the destruction of conventional expectations of meanings contains the germs of new investigations. In this space understanding does not unfold organically, but meaning is often hidden in the gaps and fissures of the hermeneutical enterprise. Adaptation is the uncanny *home* of “impure” and nomadic narratives, which, by refusing to become monuments of a dead tradition, continue to inspire new encounters and reject the closure of all exegeses of classification and authority. In the hermeneutics of adaptation sketched in this book, contact with cultural, historical, and aesthetic otherness produces understanding insofar as it elicits questions both about that estranging difference and the identity that is “naturally” taken for granted. Gadamer’s fusion of horizons does not simply mean that, in meaningful journeys of discovery, we come to understand what is different but that we allow that very difference to change us in meaningful ways. Even more radically, *When Stories Travel* has examined how adaptive encounters can challenge our very notion of self and our sense of being in a world marked by stable and reassuring margins and emplotted in well-made conventional (Barthes’s “readerly”) narratives. If the postmodern Hermes is no longer a patron of fixed boundaries and his flights are more labyrinthine and nomadic than those of his classical predecessor (of whom he is the Nietzschean other), this ambassador of a “hermeneutics of estrangement” does not claim that understanding has become impossible or futile. The self-conscious questioning of all certainty, presence, and logos does not usher in nihilism. Rather, it builds a quintessentially *adaptive* experience of selfhood and understanding that develops in the agoraic and transient domain of intricate, unfinished, even *improbable*, but always transformative, encounters.¹

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Notes

Introduction

1. If we are to believe Linda Seger's statement that "85 percent of all Academy Award-winning Best Pictures are adaptations," it becomes clear that adaptation has long inspired deeply contrasting responses rather than wholesale dismissal (xi). Boyum, of course, was speaking *intra muros*, referring to film theorists and scholars rather than to practitioners or general moviegoers. For a list of early surveys of the numbers of films adapted from novels or plays see Bluestone 2–4; Tibbetts, *The American* 10; and, more generally, Andrew, "Adaptation" 29 (previously published as chap. 6 in his *Concepts in Film Theory*). See also Desmond and Hawkes 2; Beja 78; Cartmell and Whelehan, "Introduction" 23–24; Leitch 22–46; and esp. Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 21.

2. Recent studies have questioned the very term *adaptation* as an apt descriptor for the complex process under study in this book and have suggested several alternatives, such as *transformation*, *spinoff*, *alteration*, *offshoot*, *appropriation*, *transmutation*, *transfiguration*, *reinvisioning*, and *recreation* (See Fischlin and Fortier 2–4; Stam, "Introduction" 24–25; Bernardi 7–8). These labels have both useful and misleading connotations. Denis Salter's neologism *tradaptation* (a term that he, in turn, borrows from the Québécois poet and playwright Michel Garneau) would capture my book's emphasis on adaptations as translations from different cultural and linguistic domains, but it lacks the general currency that *adaptation* has and risks becoming a label shared only by a few *addetti ai lavori* (Salter 123). I have chosen to stick with *adaptation* because its etymology already implies the idea of fitting something to a new context. I also share Fischlin and Fortier's viewpoint, fully developed by Linda Hutcheon, that adaptation is a *process* and a *product*, an ongoing transformation as well as a completed work.

3. For a detailed evaluation of the contribution of these theories to the field of media studies, and adaptation in particular, see Stam, "Introduction" 8–14. I am aware that not everybody shares my opinion on the state of adaptation studies, a notoriously contentious area—a "minefield," in fact, in the minds of some (Cardwell 2). In 1996 Brian McFarlane lamented "how little systematic, sustained attention has been given to the process of adaptation" (*Novel* 3). In 2000 James Naremore bemoaned the fact that the subject of adaptation has constituted one "of the most jejune areas of scholarly writing about the cinema" ("Introduction" 1); and, one year later, Robert B. Ray echoed the same concerns, wondering why "so little distinguished work" was being done in this field of media studies (120). José Luis Sánchez Noriega correctly, if impatiently, chastised the field's "lugares comunes y reiteraciones" ("commonplaces and redundancies") (17). Indeed, even a cursory survey of the field leaves one with the impression of "going around in circles" or bouncing back and forth between belligerent and polarized

camps (Cardwell 10, 31). The temptation to start anew, from a hermeneutical *tabula rasa* so to speak, in order to avoid futile contention and further redundancy, has its own drawbacks. Apart from the danger of preaching dialogism while practicing a monologue, this approach would ungenerously elide the valuable contributions to a field that (in the Gadamerian spirit guiding this book) would undoubtedly profit from more inclusive and less dogmatic evaluations. In *Adaptation Revisited* Sarah Cardwell offers an intelligent overview of the salient critical trajectories, interpretive methodologies, and theoretical frameworks that have shaped the relatively young field of adaptation studies (43–76).

4. Robert Stam demonstrated the kind of rhetorical bias that has accompanied adaptation, exiling it in this kind of no-man's land: "*Infidelity* resonates with overtones of Victorian prudishness; *betrayal* evokes ethical perfidy; *deformation* implies aesthetic disgust; *violation* calls to mind sexual violence; *vulgarization* conjures up class degradation; and *deseccration* intimates a kind of religious sacrilege toward the 'sacred word'" ("Beyond Fidelity" 54; see similar arguments in McFarlane, *Novel* 12; G  loin 136–37; and Leitch 6–7). One could add to the list the widespread tendency, still predominant in Italy, to discuss any adaptation as a *riduzione*, a term favored even by such a subtle scholar as Pio Baldelli (*Film* 12). Analogous to the English "abridgment" (reduction, emendation, digest), this term has obvious limiting connotations based on the truism that filmmakers generally condense the events of the novels they adapt. On the "elegiac discourse of loss" marking the rhetoric of adaptation see Stam, "Introduction" 3.

5. While I share Bakhtin's view of the hybridism and "doubleness" of the marketplace, I do not agree with his notion of the "extraterritoriality" of the marketplace from "official order and official ideology" (*Rabelais* 154). The marketplace is not a pure outside but, rather, the crossroads of numerous cultural and ideological forces. It is a place where the discourse of authority comes into play with subversive and distorting discourses, in various constellations of power, influence, and outcome (Stallybrass and White 27–31).

6. Undoubtedly, the selection of films and narratives that I discuss in this book could have been extended to other cultural areas as well. I chose to engage in dialogues with the films and texts in their original idioms and therefore limited my study to works in the languages that I know.

7. For a detailed discussion of how adaptation studies have tended to promote the "intellectual priority and formal superiority of canonical novels" and have regarded cinema as "belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior," see Naremore, "Introduction" 6; Miccich  , *La ragione* 153; Leitch 2–5; and the excellent study by Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," the main points of which are expanded and reassessed in his "Introduction" to the volume *Literature and Film*.

8. To borrow G  rard Genette's words, adaptation is a quintessentially transtextual enterprise—a conscious effort to "put one text in a relationship . . . with other texts" (*Palimpsests* 1). On the notion of "contested homage" see Greenberg 115; and on the "palimpsestuous" nature of adaptation see Hutcheon (via Genette): "An adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 9). Adaptation is "repetition . . . without replication [involving] both memory and change, persistence and variation" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 173).

9. In the ample field of fidelity studies the defense of a film's need to remain true

to the literary original finds one of the most eloquent, if debatable, articulations in Gene D. Phillips's *Hemingway and Film* (1980). With their belief that film can (and should) reproduce faithfully the *content* of an original literary matrix, studies like Phillips's help cement "unexamined assumptions about the relative cultural status of literature and film" (Marcus 24). Besides corroborating the normative cultural authority of literature over film, these source-driven views fail to account for the so-called original's cultural richness and isolate it in an abstract, if independent, vacuum—a model that the copy strives to replicate either in "the letter or the spirit." Although, by failing to address the transformative power of adaptation, the act of reproducing the letter of an "original" has limited aesthetic and cultural value, the very possibility of defining what the "spirit" (also defined as "intention," "style," "tone," or "feeling/ethos") of the source might have been is a questionable enterprise. "Fidelity to the letter, in contrast to fidelity to the spirit," writes Christopher Orr, "can after all be verified" (74). See also Sinyard, "Lids" 147; Andrew, "Adaptation" 31–32; McFarlane, *Novel* 8–9; and Seger 157. "The mens auctoris," Gadamer writes in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, "is not admissible as a yardstick for the meaning of a work of art" (xxxix). Besides fetishizing the ethos of the Implicit Author as the omniscient impersonal consciousness of God, to quote Barthes (*Image* 111), and offering no objectively measurable criteria, the concept of "spiritual fidelity" implies that of an "ideal viewer" implicitly inscribed in the film. Rather than speaking of novelist, director, and ideal reader or viewer as sharing "a particular . . . artistic temperament and preoccupations" (Sinyard, "Lids" 147)—a notion that carries a number of elitist implications—I recommend identifying the specific intellectual community that recognizes and favors certain interpretive lines in order to engage them critically and dialogically. For other indictments of the orthodoxy of faithful adaptation see Cardwell 9–25. A criticism of the "equivalency" approach (the idea that the filmmaker finds the equivalents in film for the novelist's techniques) can be found in Stam, "Introduction" 18–19. Intertextual and dialogical approaches (esp. Barthes, Kristeva, and Bakhtin) are powerful allies to adaptation studies in their belief that all production is reproduction of already existing cultural materials. By debunking normative notions of authorship and originality, these approaches focus on the transformation, recontextualization, and refunctioning of shared cultural forms.

10. "fra cinema e letteratura si leva la barriera discriminante, rappresentata da due 'mezzi' fondamentalmente diversi" (*Le parole* 238).

11. Kamilla Elliott has debunked this opinion in an ambitious discussion of the problematic history of the "word/image" divide that examines, with adaptation, hybrid forms such as illustrated novels and worded films.

12. "inscindibile dalle forme in cui è stato calato" (cited in Micciché, *La ragione* 166).

13. For a detailed reading of early critics of adaptation either in the name of the purity and uniqueness of the media (Vachel Lindsay, Béla Balázs) or in defense of high art against the vampiric attacks of mass culture (Woolf, Arendt, Newman, Peary and Shatzkin), see Boyum 3–13; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 2–3, 34–35; Ross 1–4; and, especially, Groensteen and Gaudreault 9–20; and Elliott 1–2, 11–16. Useful comments are also in Marcus 13–19; Stam, "Beyond Fidelity" 54; Naremore, "Introduction" 2–3; and Corrigan 29–33. For a meticulous overview of the academic biases and ideological purposes sustaining the belief in the unique nature of cinematic representation, and a detailed critique of medium-specific arguments, see Carroll 1–78; and Cardwell 43–48. While efforts to state the unique features of one art form as opposed to another have a

long critical history (references to G. E. Lessing's *Laocöon* abound in adaptation studies), the problems with film, one of the most synthesizing and inclusive art forms, become more subtle (see Klein 3; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 35). In Susan Sontag's view film is a "kind of pan-art" ("A Note" 245) and in Boyum's a "melting pot" medium, one that "not only shares each and every one of its qualities with other art forms, but combines the effects of all of them—an art that can incorporate pretty much any other art" (Boyum 12, 15). For a more general view of the interdependent and composite union of the arts see McLuhan 48–55; and Moholy-Nagy 270–352.

14. For a detailed overview of critical positions for and against the severability of story and discourse see Marcus 11–12. For an application of Boris Tomaševskij's distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet* to adaptation theory see Gaudreault and Marion 32–52.

15. Heteroglossia, as explained by Michael Holquist, is "the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical . . .—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 428).

16. "All translation," writes Theo Hermans, "implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose" (11). On the notion of "transcultural adaptations" as "indigenization" see Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 148–53. More generally, on adaptation as translation, see Stam, "Beyond Fidelity" 62–64; and, especially, Cattrysse, "Film (Adaptation) as Translation" and *Pour une théorie* 1–42.

17. For Barthes's analysis of the process of filiation see *Image* 160–61.

18. See also Miller, "Narrative" 66. On the concept of "narrare cinematografico" see Micciché, *La ragione* 147–77. On the centrality of narrative to both fiction and film see also McFarlane, *Novel* 11–13.

19. "arti dell'azione narrativa" (Micciché, *La ragione* 169). On narrative as a way of "comprehending space, time, and causality" in film see Branigan, *Narrative* 33–55. See also Richardson 4.

20. George Bluestone held the opposite belief in his pioneering *Novels into Films*, where he argued that "between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media" (1). As late as 2005, John C. Tibbetts and James M. Welsh's introduction to *The Encyclopedia of Novels into Films* reiterated the stubborn rhetoric that continues to evaluate the two media in an oppositional and hierarchical logic: "Literature and film . . . : the conjunction is not necessarily conjugal and the word *and* is deceptive, for it functions to link opposing elements and mentalities—art and commerce, individual creativity and collaborative fabrication, culture and mass culture, the verbal and the visual" (xv).

21. See McFarlane, *Novel to Film* 19–20; and Bordwell 33–40.

22. On the concept of enunciation as applied to cinema see Jost 121–31; Casetti, *Dentro lo sguardo* 27; and Simon and Vernet.

23. The classic analysis of the temporal order of a narrative plot is included in Genette's *Figures*; see also Chatman's discussion of point of view and voice in his *Story and Discourse* 151–260; and Bordwell 48–61.

24. In Andrew's words: "Despite their very different material character . . . verbal and cinematic signs share a common fate: that of being condemned to connotation. . . . Thus, for example, imagery functions equivalently in films and novels. . . . The story

can be the same if the narrative units (characters, events, motivations, consequences, context, viewpoint, imagery, and so on) are produced equally in two works. . . . The analysis of adaptation then must point to the achievement of equivalent narrative units in the absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language" (*Concepts* 103). See also Wagner 226–31; and Richardson 50–78. For a sophisticated response to Andrew's argument, and a more nuanced view of adaptation as analogy, see Elliott 1–30.

25. For a critique of the comparative approach see Cardwell 61–64. For a criticism of the "réduction linguistique du cinéma" see Ropars-Wuilleumier 13–17.

26. Though admitting that there can be no neat pigeonholes, Geoffrey Wagner, for example, recognizes three modes of adaptation: (a) *transposition* (an authoritative novel is given directly to the screen with a minimum of interference); (b) *commentary* (a novel is altered and restructured by the different intention on the part of the filmmaker); (c) *analogy* (a novel is considerably altered for the sake of making another work of art) (222–27). Similar groupings (defined as "literal," "critical," and "free") are also in Klein 9–10. More useful, for my study, is Andrew's definition of *borrowing*, which he separates from the other adaptive categories of *fidelity* and *transformation* (comparable to Wagner's transposition) and *intersection*. Borrowing emphasizes the "generality" of the adapted material, its "existence as a continuing form of archetype in culture." In this form of adaptation the encounter between adapting and adapted texts occurs on the level of the great "fructifying symbol and mythical patterns of civilization" ("Adaptation" 30). The opposite of borrowing, intersecting is a refusal of adaptation. It defines "works that foreground the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text, initiating a dialectic interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period and the cinematic forms of our own period," thus requiring that we "attend to the specificity of the original within the specificity of cinema" ("Adaptation" 31). More recently, Elliott has structured the adaptive relationship between fiction and film according to six "concepts" (specifically, the "psychic," "ventriloquist," "genetic," "de(re)composing," "incarnational," and "trumping" concepts) (133–83). Thomas Leitch has provided the most flexible reading so far, with the ten categories of "celebration," "adjustment," "neoclassic imitation," "revision," "colonization," "metacommentary," "analogue," "parody and pastiche," "secondary, tertiary, or quaternary imitation," and "allusion." While these categories offer the assurance of classification and order, one would be hard-pressed to establish with any kind of analytical rigor where to place, for example, the borderline between commentary and transposition. Leitch himself argues that although his ten categories "might seem to form a logical progression from faithful adaptation to allusion, they are embarrassingly fluid," as even the most straightforward adaptations make use of different intertextual strategies (123, 124). Furthermore, as Cartmell and Whelehan warned, often hidden in these taxonomies are "value judgments and a consequent ranking of types" that tend to favor literary over cinematic perspectives ("Introduction" 2). I do not organize the works I study according to these categories, as I am more interested in hybrid crossovers than normative taxonomies.

27. See also McFarlane, *Novel* 20.

28. For a definition of the novel as an "ever-developing" genre see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic* 3–40. Boris Eikhenbaum argued that adaptation involves a dynamics of *both* differentiation and syncretization, a process where the assimilation of elements from other arts involves restructuring these elements in novel and *heterogeneous* arrangements (10).

29. In spite of his argument defending the "root difference" between film and fiction,

Bluestone acknowledged that they were both protean forms that assimilated numerous other media, thus paving an interpretive road that he himself did not fully follow (7–8).

30. In the case of fiction and film, specifically, adaptation transforms and enriches the single-track mode of the novel (the written word) into the multitrack and multiformat modes of film (moving photographic images, performance, music, sound effects and phonetic sounds, written materials, etc.).

31. For a discussion of “paper beings” see Barthes, *Image* 111.

32. On how different media presuppose varied audiences, “whose demands condition and shape artistic content,” see Bluestone 31–45. See also Casetti, “Adaptation and Mis-adaptations” 81–91; and Rentschler 3–7.

33. As Bluestone emphasized in discussing the role of big business and the Production Code in Hollywood films, adapters must be able to negotiate between the different sets of requirements and conventions that define the institutional status of literature and cinema (34–45).

34. Acting, costume, and setting, for example, are semiotic codes shared by film and theater; however, the conventions of these codes change from one medium to the other and are subject to cultural and historical specificities. It is understood today that stage acting is different from cinematic acting, but it was not so at the dawn of cinema (in the tradition of the Italian *Kolossals* of the early twentieth century, for example). A veil worn by an actress playing a Sicilian nineteenth-century peasant has a different meaning from a veil worn by someone playing a woman in contemporary Iran. A kiss between two men has a different meaning altogether in the setting of *The Godfather* compared to that of *Brokeback Mountain*. As we will see, the sociocultural implications of using a hobo as the main character in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* are both similar and different from those of using a vagrant in fascist Italy, as depicted in *Ossessione*.

35. For a punctual analysis of the difference between “deep structures” and “surface structures” see Greimas 793–97.

36. On film and literature as “versions of mythmaking” see McConnell 3–20.

37. We can read this to include the activity of the director who leads the collective making of a film, and the *pathos* of involved audiences, who, in diverse situations will interrogate and respond to the text and the film in different ways.

38. See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 79–85. The relative importance given to collaboration and authorial control depends, of course, on many variables, including the director’s temperament and style, but this does not deny that even the most self-reflexive films are the product of complex collaborative practices. My use of the term *orchestration* refers to Bakhtin’s view of the author as the “orchestrator” of varied and preexisting discourses.

39. For an excellent discussion of Gadamer’s critique of Descartes and post-Cartesian philosophy, particularly of the notion of methodical doubt and the possibility to rid oneself of all prejudices and former opinions, see R. Bernstein 116–17.

40. See Gadamer, *Truth* 265–85.

41. For the detailed list of these biases see Stam, “Introduction” 3–8. Stam’s useful list must not be understood as universally applicable. His evaluation of *iconophobia*, for example, is well taken, but one must point out that this prejudice is much stronger in Protestant and Islamic traditions, than in, say, the Catholic world. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s films, just to cite a meaningful example, draw from the extraordinary valorization of religious art that defines Italian medieval, Renaissance, and baroque cultures. Films

like *La ricotta*, *Il Vangelo second Matteo*, and *Accattone* respond, with *both* reverence and iconoclasm, to this culture and its deep-felt *iconophilia*. For a counterview to Stam's assessment see LeGrice 228–29. On the entrenched belief in literature's superiority over film and television see especially Cardwell 31–36.

42. On the use of the printed and spoken word in film to undermine a too drastic word/image divide see Elliott; Morrisette 13; and Cardwell 36–38.

43. I am emphasizing cultural difference and specificity, but professional and academic training should be taken into consideration, too. Compared to film and television theorists, scholars working from a literature perspective bring differing expertise, training, knowledge, and prejudices to adaptation studies (Cardwell 40). The hermeneutical potential of their encounter is shadowed only by the intensity of their rivalry.

44. This exercise in understanding implies, therefore, an overcoming (but not abolition) of individual particularities. Understanding implies an act of translation (or, in our case, adaptation) from something that is initially “foreign” to the interpreter but in some ways binding for his or her reading (Grondin 43). The otherness of a specific hermeneutical object must be rendered in terms that are present and relevant to the interpreter, and this is particularly appropriate when stories migrate and mutate across times and cultures. In the context of this book, Cain's and Visconti's renditions of the classical concept of fate in the milieus of Depression-era California and fascist Italy, respectively, exemplify this view. We are not dealing with a process of substitution here, where a boilerplate, if exotic, idea (“fate”) is superimposed onto different and more familiar settings. Rather, what we witness is how (and why) specific interpreters chose to mediate a concept that was formulated in ancient Greece and came to them and their audiences with all the uncanny otherness of cultural and epochal distance. Cain and Visconti interpreted and refunctioned the alien notion of fate in terms pertinent and significant to their respective subject matters, thus inviting fresh interpretations. Understanding, therefore, results from the interaction among various hermeneutical “situations” (but one could use Dewey's notion of experience, via Hegel's *Erfahrung*, as well). These hermeneutical situations inspire, enrich, and illuminate one another and together reach what Gadamer, through Nietzsche and Husserl, defined as the “fusion of horizons” (“Horizontverschmelzung”), which allows deeper and broader understanding (*Truth* 302).

45. Using a simple metaphor, Gadamer argues that “if we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, for example, then we will understand him—i.e. become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting *ourselves* in his position” (*Truth* 305). Gadamer is adamant to avoid misunderstanding in this sense:

Do not make me say what I have not in fact said; and I have *not* said that when we listen to someone or when we read we ought to forget our own opinions or shield ourselves against forming an anticipatory idea about the content of communication. In reality, to be open to “other people's opinions,” to a text, and so forth, implies right off that they are *situated* in my system of opinions, or better, that I situate myself in relation to them. . . . A consciousness formed by the authentic hermeneutical attitude will be receptive to the origins and entirely foreign features of that which comes to it from outside its own horizons. (“The Problem” 151)

In tune with this approach, my readings of adaptive practices embrace the Foucauldian notion of the anonymity of the authorial (and interpretive) function only insofar as it agrees that this function is quintessentially hybrid, made of a plethora of preexisting discourses and often fissured by silences and gaps, but does not deny presence and intentionality in favor of an endless play of Derridean dissemination.

46. I borrow the notion of “knowing audience” from Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation* 120).

47. Hutcheon defines adaptation as “repetition with variation”—a practice and experience where the comfort of ritual is combined with (I would rather say estranged by) surprise, and the challenge of change is familiarized by acts of recollection and recognition (*A Theory of Adaptation* 4).

48. For a discussion of the ideology of form see Eagleton, *Marxism* 20–36; and White, *The Content* 1–25. On the notion of emplotment see White, *Metahistory* 7–11.

49. For a detailed analysis of the linguistic sign as involving the two modes of arrangement of combination and selection see Jakobson’s classic study “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances.” For a useful list of definitions see Hjelmslev 83–87.

50. Ricci’s *Ligabue* is neither a comprehensive nor an objective *catalogue raisonné* but an apparently random selection of Ligabue’s bizarre paintings interspersed with the impassioned, lyrical, and meandering commentary by Ligabue’s famed *conterraneo*, the screenwriter Cesare Zavattini. Zavattini’s suggestive biographical vignettes of Ligabue’s nomadic wanderings along the riverbanks, poplar woods, and mosquito-infested lowlands of *la bassa* translate the vivid concreteness of Ligabue’s world with all the referential intensity and material vigor of the language of neorealism. At the same time, Zavattini does not attempt to explain away the estranging otherness of Ligabue and his art. Rather, he draws on lyrical indirection and analogical approximation to evoke its mystery, de facto declining to impose the interpreter’s intellectual mastery on Ligabue’s uncanny heterologies but letting them bring their estranging potential into the new hermeneutical context in which they participate.

51. The analogy between the unconscious and cinema, which Bertolucci invoked often, has a long critical history and is emphasized by the poets of the Dada and surrealist period (Morrisette 13). Theorists from Munsterberg to Eikhenbaum and Metz would argue that psychoanalytical theories are particularly well suited to analyzing film, given its analogies with the structures of the subconscious and the language of dreams.

52. For a critique of the view that sees adaptations as hopeless imitations of an unreachable Platonic ideal, see Ray 127–28. Similarly, Bruce Kawin started his influential work on repetition in fiction and film by stating that “the growth of a work, even from one identical line to another, makes exact repetition impossible” (7).

53. See Branigan, *Point of View* 127–32; and Metz, *L’énonciation* 79–83.

54. For an inspiring discussion of the “generative” power of topological manipulations such as interior duplication, inner reflection, mise en abyme, reversal, infolding, turning inside out “to produce a radically new kind of novel and film,” see Morrisette 1–11 and 141–56. On the notion of displacement see Casetti, “Adaptation” 83; Bernardi; and Andrew, *Concepts* 154.

55. In “Pour une approche sociocritique de l’adaptation cinématographique: L’exemple de *Mort à Venise*,” Monique Carcaud-Macaire and Jeanne-Marie Clerc create the definition of the “tiers interprétant” (based on Louis Quéré’s notion of the “tiers sym-

bolisant”) to designate the mechanism of dynamic mediation between fiction and film along sociocultural lines.

56. “‘sempre eguale’ a partire dal sempre diverso” (Fortini 245).

57. On “the tracing and singling out of a ‘convenient’ structure within the continuous magma of reality” see Bettetini 59. On adaptation as “dialogical” enterprise see also Gélain 138–48.

CHAPTER ONE: “Fear Death by Water”

1. Stoddard Martin perceptively noted that Cain based his apparently realistic dialogue on an expressive grid recalling the “chromatic progressions” (155) of late romantic opera, and, along similar lines, David Madden examines how Cain picked up “key words regarding future action and attitude at the end of one scene,” and developed them in the next, “with almost mathematical precision” (141–42).

2. One can think, for example, of the Tristan myth, with the mirroring Isolde and Isolde of Brittany, whose dramatic functions are to force the clash of the opposing forces of Eros and Thanatos.

3. “[Je veux] montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature, et cet homme ce sera moi” (Rousseau, *Les confessions* 43).

4. See Cain’s comments on writing *The Postman Always Rings Twice*:

I fell under the spell of a man named Vincent Lawrence. . . whose banner bore a strange device indeed: Technique. Until then I had been somewhat suspicious of technique. Not that I didn’t take pains with what I wrote, but I felt that good writing was gestative rather than fabricative, and that technique for its own sake probably anagrammed into formula. . . Also, I was for some time thoroughly suspicious of him. . . Like most fanatics he was incredibly ignorant. . . For example, he talked quite a lot about the One, the Two, and the Three, not seeming to know that these were nothing but the Aristotelian Beginning, Middle, and End. (*Three of a Kind* ix)

5. In his untypical confessional style, one that lacks the tools of introspection and self-analysis, Frank only records the surface of experiences. Alienating and nondescript locations mirror Frank’s own inconsistent identity, marking an existential progression without progress: Glendale, Hollywood, Santa Barbara, Ensenada, Santa Monica. Just like his present, Frank’s past is a dry criminal record, identifying him with the redundant list of locations where the police, at one time or another, apprehended him: Tucson, Chicago, Salt Lake City, San Diego, Wichita, Oakland.

6. “Collapse, ending, breakdown,” and the unsurpassable chasm between promise and fulfillment mark the roundabout wanderings of Cain’s heroes. With other Depression-era authors such as Nathanael West (*Miss Lonelyhearts*, 1933; *The Day of the Locust*, 1939), Horace McCoy (*They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* 1935), and F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Last Tycoon*, 1941), Cain explored the American dream turned nightmare (see Fine 26).

7. See also London’s “How I Became a Socialist.”

8. “The revolution is here, now,” London wrote in 1905; “stop it who can” (“Revolution” 504). As Feied points out, London never doubted that “social wrongs were to be righted—and soon. . . . At the time there seemed ample cause for such exuberance. In the election of the preceding year 400,000 votes had been cast for Debs and socialism.

Perhaps even more significant, the year 1905 saw the organization of the International Workers of the World, a revolutionary offshoot of the labor movement. Those who urged social change were, not unnaturally, optimistic; and London's hobo, garrulous, free-wheeling, and gregarious, is a true creature of his times" (40).

9. *The 42nd Parallel* and *Nineteen Nineteen* were published before *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, in 1930 and 1932, respectively. The last volume, *The Big Money*, appeared in 1936, two years after Cain's novel.

10. In one of U.S.A.'s early chapters Dos Passos reported this fragment of retiring governor Hazen S. Pingree's address to the Michigan State Legislature: "I make the prediction that unless those in charge and in whose hands legislation is reposed do not change the present system of inequality, there will be a bloody revolution in less than a quarter of a century in this great country of ours" (35). In the following thirteen hundred pages Dos Passos recorded in painstaking detail the increasing sense of frustration and futility that followed the failure of Pingree's prediction.

11. Two years after Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Dos Passos paints a remarkably similar scene of destitute bleakness:

The young man waits at the edge of the concrete, with one hand he grips a rubbed suitcase of phony leather, the other hand almost making a fist, thumb up . . . went to school, books said opportunity, ads promised speed, own your home, shine bigger than your neighbor, the radiocrooner whispered girls, ghosts of platinum girls coaxed from the screen, millions in winnings were chalked up on the boards in the offices, paychecks were for hands willing to work, the cleared desk of an executive with three telephones on it; waits with swimming head, needs knot the belly, idle hands numb, besides the speeding traffic. A hundred miles down the road. (U.S.A. 1183–84)

12. The phrase "gossamer fidelity" comes from "The Black Cat": "There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*" (200).

13. "Mad am I not—and very surely I do not dream" (Poe, "The Black Cat" 199).

CHAPTER TWO: Myth in the Mirror of History

Epigraph. Ci si accorse, durante quegli anni di studio, che l'America non era un *altro* paese, un *nuovo* inizio della storia, ma soltanto il gigantesco teatro dove con maggiore franchezza che altrove veniva recitato il dramma di tutti.

1. Mario Alicata, Gianni Puccini, Giuseppe De Santis, and Visconti completed the script in the winter of 1941–42. Alberto Moravia, whose Jewish name was not included in the credits, contributed to the dialogue (Alicata, "Testimonianze" 183). *Ossessione* premiered in Rome in the spring of 1943 during a film festival hosted by the Duce's son Vittorio Mussolini. In 1945 the fascists confiscated Visconti's original negative and edited it into a shorter version. The original negative was either lost or destroyed. The extant copies of *Ossessione* have been made from a duplicate negative, which Visconti claimed to be incomplete. In the United States *Ossessione* was not released until the late 1970s, as Visconti used Cain's story without securing proper copyright permission. See Rondolino 113, 115; and Tonetti 29–30. For detailed information about *Ossessione's*

"creative team" see Micciché, *Visconti* 26–32. For Visconti's relationship with fascist censors and the early reception of *Ossessione* see Bacon. For the vicissitudes of *Ossessione* in the United States see Knight 223.

2. Visconti was then working as a member of Renoir's production team, first as costume director and then as Renoir's assistant director on *Une partie de campagne* ("A Day in the Country," 1936) and *Les bas-fonds* ("The Lower Depths," 1936). In numerous interviews, Visconti remembered that early journey from fascist Italy to the France of the Popular Front as an epiphanic journey—a "road to Damascus" that led him to an aesthetically innovative and politically engaged approach to cinema (Baldelli, *Luchino Visconti* 21). Renoir himself had received the scrapbook—which Giuseppe De Santis described as "a long summary almost certainly derived from the novel's French edition" (26)—from Julien Duvivier. It is reasonable to surmise that both Renoir and Duvivier may originally have planned to adapt *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to the big screen. Pierre Chenal beat everybody to the chase, premiering his *Le dernier tournant* in 1939. My discussion does not address other adaptations of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, nor does it consider *Ossessione* in the context of the film noir genre or of Hollywood's wartime movies. For discussions of the various Hollywood adaptations of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* see Leff and Simmons. See also Fieschi (1–24) for an excellent overview of the four adaptations by Pierre Chenal, Visconti, Tay Garnett, and Bob Rafelson.

3. According to Adelio Ferrero: "la narrativa americana è presente soltanto come riferimento molto generale, soltanto a livello di suggestioni che Visconti—a suo modo al gruppo di *Cinema*—poteva trarre dalle letture e dalle proposizioni di alcuni suoi compagni di strada" ("American narrative is present only as a very general reference, and only at the level of some suggestions that Visconti, who in his own way was tied to the group of 'Cinema,' was gathering from the readings and ideas of some of his travel companions") (18). Similarly, Fernaldo Di Giammatteo argued that "Il fenomeno *Ossessione* . . . non rientrava in quel 'revival' americano di cui tanto si è parlato, e favoleggiato, a proposito delle radici del neorealismo" ("the phenomenon of *Ossessione* . . . was not part of that American 'revival' about which so much has been said, and invented, regarding the roots of neorealism") (8–9). Undoubtedly, the hasty dismissal of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as the source for *Ossessione* depends, in part, on the exegetical vicissitudes of Cain's novel in its own homeland. In spite of their success among the large reading public, authoritative interpreters such as Edmund Wilson scornfully labeled Cain's novels as the "Devil's parody of the movies," in their use of "the wooden old conventions of Hollywood," and their exploitation of "sex, debauchery, [and] unpunished crime" (21–22).

4. On the influence of French cinema in *Ossessione* see Baldelli, *Luchino Visconti* 21–25; Nowell-Smith 14–15; and Mangini 259–70. Giovanni Leto makes a rather unconvincing case for Visconti's intellectual isolation in "Da *Ossessione* a *Senso*" 3–17.

5. Giuseppe Cintioli argues that in *Ossessione* "non [è] tanto la maniera di un Cain . . . che ha suggerito la vicenda, quanto certi sentiti fermenti di tutta una cultura osservata dal terreno italiano . . . denso di altri umori e di altre condanne" ("it [is]n't so much Cain's style . . . that suggested the story, but certain felt ferments of a whole culture observed from the Italian soil, . . . ripe with other moods and other denunciations") (53). According to Alicata, Visconti only borrowed the central theme of Cain's story: "una bella giovane, sposa di un marito anziano e brutto che si innamora di un giovane capitato per caso nel loro esercizio, e poi l'assicurazione, l'assassinio e la morte per inci-

dente durante la fuga" ("A beautiful young woman marries an ugly elderly husband and falls in love with a young man who comes to their inn by chance. And then the insurance, the murder, and the accidental death during their escape") ("Lettera" 155). Visconti himself spoke of Cain's novel as a mere "traccia aneddotica" ("anecdotic outline"), adding that "qualunque altra vicenda avrebbe servito ugualmente" ("any other story would have been equally useful") (quoted in Baldelli, *Luchino Visconti* 55–56). Besides the obvious "anxiety of influence," Visconti's reticence in acknowledging the influence of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* on *Ossessione* may be related to the perceived literary value of Cain's works. In spite of Pavese's enthusiastic reviews, Cain was considered a second-rate novelist. For a dismissive evaluation of Cain's novel see also Kazin (386–88); and Mangini (260).

6. For an introductory discussion of the influence of American fiction on neorealism (both literary and cinematic) see Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* 24–26.

7. In a 1984 preface to a new edition of *Americana* Claudio Gorlier discusses Vittorini's "singolari sopravvalutazioni" ("curious overestimations") of authors like Cain, Caldwell, and Saroyan in ideological rather than aesthetic terms. When Vittorini wrote to Valentino Bompiani "Hai visto . . . le mie note su Caldwell e Cain? Ci sarebbero magnifici libri da tradurre di questi due. Ma disgraziatamente sono tutti *censurabili*" ("Did you see . . . my notes on Caldwell and Cain? There are great books to translate from these two authors. Unfortunately, they would all be *subject to censorship*"), he identified the reasons for these authors' appeal: their scandalous themes were a slap in the face to fascist *perbenismo* (Gorlier xi–xii). The intensely personal and political engagement with American literature is especially evident in the creative, often idiosyncratic, translations of American classics provided by writers such as Vittorini, Pavese, Eugenio Montale, Guido Piovene, Giorgio Bassani, and Alberto Moravia, who translated Cain's short-story, "Il baritono."

8. Bassani published his Italian translation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in 1945.

9. According to Giuseppe De Santis,

As soon as we arrived in Ferrara, [we met] a budding writer . . . [who] signed his name, then, Giacomo Marchi out of political necessity because he was of Jewish origin, but his real name was Giorgio Bassani. . . .

Bassani was among the few in Italy to own an English copy of Cain's novel, which we had searched for in vain. . . . So Visconti . . . had the chance to read, finally, although too late (the dice of story and script were already cast) the impassioned pages that had inspired the story of *Palude*. Later, Bassani joined us during the shooting, seeing much of us and offering useful advice about setting our story in the authentic reality of the Po Valley and of Ferrara." (29–30)

10. "un episodio isolato, autosufficiente" (Di Giammatteo 8–9).

11. De Santis expressed the urgency of Visconti's need to emerge from the regime's cultural isolation when he discussed the abundance of pictorial and literary references that inspired what happened even "behind or on the periphery of the foreground action" in *Ossessione* (30). Although, on the one hand, the background highlighted the local realism of the setting ("life which continued flowing on its own"), on the other hand, this realism was replete with allusions to broader experiential and aesthetic landscapes. A young woman listening to a song on the radio while combing her hair on the

balcony of her house is part of the background for the first encounter between Gino and Anita, a young dancer, whom he meets in the public gardens of Ferrara's Piazza Castello. This woman with her flowing hair "alluded to a painting by Picasso in his still figurative, solar, mediterranean phase. . . . Evoked by the great painter, [this image] was also Andalusian and Catalan, an emblem of the Paris *banlieue*, of the peasant French *midi*, and, above all, it was a flag perched to affirm once again our will to live on the cinematographic scene no longer confined to the provincial margins to which fascism had reduced us, but free and open within the heat of a poetic discourse sensitive to any echo or tremor that might reach us from no matter what corner of the cultural universe" (32).

12. "un racconto . . . che si addentra nella storia ma che, insieme, la trascende" (Zaccaria xxiv).

13. "uno *Zeitraum* reale, una sorta di 'presente vissuto' . . . che ne accentua il sapore di . . . naturalistica gravidanza [e] in una specie di simbolico limbo, dove diventano altrettanti archetipi di se stessi" (Visconti 49).

14. Cain's Cora, Nick, and Frank become, respectively, Giovanna (Clara Calamai), Bragana (Juan de Landa), and Gino (Massimo Girotti) in *Ossessione*.

15. One of the most sustained attempts at subjective cinema adapted from hard-boiled fiction is Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1946), based on Raymond Chandler's detective novel. Montgomery shot the entire film from the point of view of the protagonist, detective Phillip Marlowe, so the only time we see him is when he is reflected in mirrors.

16. For a detailed list of structural equivalences and plot analogies, including similarities in dialogue and character presentation, between *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Ossessione*, see Micciché, *Visconti* 33–36.

17. "offre una composizione scenica da tragedia antica, che potrebbe svolgersi ed animarsi con qualche riduzione di spazio anche sulle tavole del palcoscenico" (*Luchino Visconti* 27).

18. See Giovanna's words to Gino after they become lovers: "Allora . . . dovrà pure accadere qualche cosa per noi . . ." ("Now, then, something has to happen for us"). Similarly cryptic is Giovanna's statement to Gino, before they get in the car that will kill Bragana: "Subito! . . . Capisci? Subito. . . ." ("Right now! . . . Do you understand? Right now. . ."). The dinner scene at the Braganas' home, with Bragana's reference to a certain Saffi, killed "[da] uno dei suoi braccianti per via della moglie" ("[by] one of his hands because of his wife") anticipates his own murder. Everything in this scene—the characters' triangular arrangement at the dinner table, Bragana and Giovanna's squabble over the spicy food, the swinging lamp and impending storm, the cats in heat and Bragana's gun—anticipates the events to come (Visconti, *Ossessione* 37, 71, 45).

19. "Next thing I knew, I was down there with her, and we were staring in each other's eyes, and locked in each other's arms, and straining to get closer. Hell could have opened for me then, and it wouldn't have made any difference. I had to have her, if I hung for it. I had her" (Cain, *Postman* 46).

20. For a different interpretation, one that sees *Ossessione* as a nonpolitical film, see Debreczeni 36–44.

21. De Santis may have thought of his native Fondi with its surrounding marshes as a possible setting for *Ossessione*. As evident in De Santis's humorous comments below, the differences between Cain's America and his childhood rural Ciociaria may have proven too profound to sustain Visconti's adaptive project. The Po Delta Valley, with

“its culture of the soil on the threshold of technology,” was a more viable counterpart to Cain’s setting (29). Of the differences between Southern California and his *Meridione*, De Santis wrote:

[Cain’s] novel was full of insurance on life, houses, cars, and on everything insurable; one saw depicted here the sleazy sexual atmosphere of drugstores and motels, of truckstops and diners strewn along the great American highways—places frequented by vagrants of every race—and one was aware that the novel treated nomadism as a normal condition of life. In this vortex of incessant motion and among this heap of insurance papers, one breathed a steady air of sexuality and death. . . . Even to a blind man it would have been obvious that all this could have nothing to do with the archaic peace, the proud immobility, and the patriarchal dogma on whose breast rested without a jolt the people of my hometown located on a swamp. At Fondi the donkey and the bicycle still prevailed; the roads were not wider than a couple of ditches; of insurance we only knew the one given by a handshake between buyers and sellers; vagrants were allowed to circulate only on the occasion of the annual fair; and, finally, postmen did not knock on any door nor could they be expected to ring non-existent doorbells so that it was considered a great privilege if they peeked in your window to call you aloud; normally the few pieces of mail that arrived were customarily handed over to the friend, or a cousin, or to a neighbor encountered on the street by chance.” (27)

22. GIOVANNA. Questa è la vita, Gino. . . .

GINO. Sì, questa è la vita finalmente, lontano da quella casa. . . .

GINO. Vedrai che tutto andrà bene. . . . E poi il destino ci aiuterà. . . . Stai tranquilla. D’ora innanzi, penserò io a tutto. . . .

GIOVANNA. (febbre) Ma a me non può succedere nulla, vero? (Visconti, *Ossessione* 132–34).

23. “Perché noi che abbiamo rubato una vita . . . possiamo renderne un’altra” (Visconti, *Ossessione* 127–28).

24. According to De Santis,

Swamp signified, according to the fashion of those days, the moral sliminess of the story’s protagonists, their gloomy, stagnant tragedy matured in the shadow of sinister interests and morbid sensuality. It was as usual Puccini (the best trained of us) who came up with that title. . . . Only when the editing was completed did *Ossessione* assume this title. . . . I’m sure that it was precisely the original title, so deliberately allusive, that stimulated Visconti and his collaborators to place, or rather to sink to the bottom, this sorrowful tale within a significant territory where a literal swamp and not a metaphoric one could participate directly. In this case, the swamp was the plains that surrounded the anguished landscape of the Valleys of Comacchio in the Po delta with their dramatic flair and their plenitude of human contents and backgrounds, considered by all of us so profound as to appear continuously traversed by flashes of dark presentiments just as our film demanded.” (25–26)

25. “una duplicità ‘lineare.’ I simboli nascono . . . per elisioni, sottointesi e ritorni di immagini” (*Americana* 2, 744).

26. See Van Watson: “Gino è più oggetto che soggetto dell’azione, viene *oggettivato* psicologicamente e visivamente” (“Gino is more the object than the subject of the action, he is *objectivized* both psychologically and visually”) (88). Without reference to gender politics Henry Bacon notes that “the most obvious change” between novel and film “is in the character of the protagonists.” In the novel Frank is “quite active and shrewd; but at times the complexity of the situations in which he finds himself overwhelms him.” In the film he instead “drifts with the tide of events,” often submitting to “the will of others” (17).

27. The complexity of the Giovanna-Gino relationship emerges clearly from the contradictory relation between visual and aural messages. When Gino first sees Giovanna, she is singing the refrain of a *canzonetta* (“popular song”) entitled “Fiorin Fiorello” (“Tiny Flower”), which was brought to international fame in 1938 by Alfredo Clerici, who became well-known in the States as “Mr. Fiorin Fiorello.” Written and composed by Vittorio Mascheroni and P. Mendes, the song was part of a musical trend that included “Reginella Campagnola” (“Country Queen”), “Campane” (“Bells”), and “Se vuoi goder la vita” (“If You Want to Enjoy Your Life”). These songs helped circulate the regime’s celebration of rural values. Against the corruption of life in the city, fascism affirmed the moral health of country life, arguing that Italy needed large families where the men worked the land and the women thrived in their roles of mothers, wives, and farmers. The feminine model, especially, was seen against the “moral decay” caused by women’s emancipation in the Anglo-Saxon world. Put into Giovanna’s voice, however, the care-free love of “Fiorin Fiorello” is ripe with ironic innuendos, as it anticipates the tragic affair between Gino and Giovanna.

28. Unlike Cain, Visconti treats the brutally sexual nature of the two protagonists’ relationship by way of indirection, ellipsis, and the recurrence of symbolic imagery. With a witty sense of comedy Visconti uses poultry as the recurring metaphor in the sequence preceding Gino’s offscreen seduction of Giovanna. The words from *La Traviata* (“Qual destino di passion” [“What passionate destiny”]) accompany the ungainly flight of four chickens, which cross the screen from left to right, apparently caught by a sudden gust of wind in the otherwise motionless landscape. Visconti’s parody of the Dantean image of the doves caught in the storm, which introduces the episode of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V, both foreshadows and debases Gino and Giovanna’s torrid affair. The poultry imagery also relates to Bragana, who calls Gino a chicken thief and identifies himself with the rooster’s sexual prowess while distancing himself from the chicken’s proverbial stupidity. The course of events comically reverses this self-interpretation, as Gino and Giovanna conspire to cheat and finally murder the unsuspecting and dim-witted patriarch.

29. On the identification between our gaze and a character’s gaze in a mirror, and his or her position in space, see Metz, *L’énonciation* 80.

30. As Baldelli notes: “gli oggetti perdono la propria autonomia per diventare strumenti e simboli del personaggio, posti a commento” (“objects lose their autonomy to become instruments and symbols of the character about whom they provide a commentary”) (41). Bacon underscores the symbolic relations between characters and space, particularly in the trattoria scenes: “Because there are only a few shots defining the different rooms of the trattoria as a whole, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the layout of the building” (24). When Gino and Giovanna return to the trattoria after the

investigation, Gino's wanderings are followed by the camera in a way that makes him appear "like . . . an animal in a cage" (24). Overall, there is a sense of "claustrophobic disorientation" (24).

31. Not only is Visconti relentless in emphasizing the fact that money shapes and controls sexual relationships in *Ossessione*; he also often points out that their *trait d'union* resides in some form of deception. After eating his first meal at the trattoria, for example, Gino pays with a few coins that he tosses on the table. Giovanna quickly pockets the money and makes Bragana believe that Gino left without paying. Bragana runs after Gino and talks him into doing some car work to pay for his debt. Gino immediately understands Giovanna's ruse and duplicates it. He accepts Bragana's offer and tricks him into leaving the inn to purchase a spare part for the car. After he leaves, Giovanna and Gino begin their affair.

32. Alicata explains that in the film's original intentions, "lo spagnuolo . . . era un proletario, il quale aveva fatto la guerra di Spagna dalla parte giusta . . . non dalla parte dei fascisti" ("Lo Spagnolo . . . was a proletarian who had fought for the right side in the Spanish civil war, . . . not on the fascists' side") ("Testimonianze" 186; see also Renzi 40).

33. "un *alter ego* di Gino" (11).

34. Visconti regarded his representation of the tramp as the film's "elemento più interessante . . . interamente creato da me" ("most interesting element . . . entirely created by me") (Visconti, "Da 'Ossessione' a 'Rocco'" 75).

35. "Leary Joe, for instance, was timid, and was so named by his fellows. No self-respecting hobo would select Stew Bum for himself. Very few tramps care to remember their pasts during which they ignobly worked, so monicas based upon trade are very rare. . . . A favorite device of hoboes is to base their monicas on the localities from which they hail, as: New York Tommy, Pacific Slim, Buffalo Smithy, Canton Tim, Pittsburgh Jack, Syracuse Shine, Troy Mickey, K. L. Bill, and Connecticut Jimmy. Then there was 'Slim Jim for Vinegar Hill, who never worked and never will'" (*The Road* 101).

36. For a different interpretation, one that emphasizes Lo Spagnolo's quasi-mythical freedom, see Mangini 266.

37. It may be more helpful to regard Lo Spagnolo's sequence as part of a subplot, aimed not only at contrasting, but at redoubling, the main plot.

38. "Vedi, Gino, il denaro ha le gambe, e deve camminare. . . . Altrimenti, se resta nelle tasche, prende la muffa. . . . Invece tu ne prendi un morso poi lo passi a un altro che anche lui ci campa. Per questo che con le lire che si fabbricano a Roma si mangia . . . a Torino e a Palermo" (Visconti, *Ossessione* 52–53).

39. One should remember, here, the extensive parallel between Plato's allegory of the cave and life in the fascist state in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1971).

40. Lo Spagnolo's shadow, in turn, repeats the shadow cast by Gino and Giovanna when they departed from the same police station, after being interrogated (and undoubtedly having lied) about Bragana's death.

41. Alicata lamented that Lo Spagnolo "doveva essere il personaggio positivo del film" ("was supposed to be the positive character in the movie") and instead ended up becoming "un personaggio molto equivoco" ("a very equivocal character") ("Testimonianze" 186).

42. "questa notte è stata una liberazione per me. . . . È come se fossi diventato un altro. . . . Ora sono certo di volerti bene, Giovanna" (Visconti, *Ossessione* 129–30).

43. From a diametrically different point of view, J. P. Telotte argues that instead of

creating “that pervasive sense of an ominous and inevitable tragic end awaiting the characters depicted” (61), *Ossessione* offers a way out of the “deterministic bind” (61). Through an implausible intellectualization of the character of Gino (he speaks of Gino’s “desire for understanding that will not be stilled”), Telotte optimistically foreshadows the possibility of a future realization of freedom and self-knowledge on the protagonist’s part: “Rather than underscore an impending doom, Visconti depicts an open-ended situation, as he brings Gino face to face with his personal and social predicament, perhaps ultimately to succumb—as many men do—or perhaps to learn from this encounter and thus, at least for a moment, transcend his human limitations. . . . *Ossessione* presents not a completely closed off future; one man reaches the end of a line of action, but precisely what is to follow remains ambiguous” (62). Though one cannot infer the director’s intentions beyond the ending of the film, I have been unable to detect any foreshadowing of Gino’s victory over “his human limitations” within the film’s diegesis. As I have demonstrated, the interplay of the film’s recurrences confirms such limitations rather than transcends them.

44. “dei puri di cuore, degli incolpevoli, delle vittime anche nello spiegarsi della passione, del tradimento, del delitto [che esistono] ‘*al di qua del bene e del male*’” (394).

CHAPTER THREE: Grotesque Doublings and the Dangers of the Sublime

1. On the evolution of this never-published volume see Mabbott 200–206; James Southall Wilson 215–20; Hammond 25–32; and Silverman 153–54, 467. These scholars’ meticulous research shows that “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” was not part of the original collection of eleven tales. However, the collection’s extended satire of the American literary establishment, the presence of Satan as one of the characters in the framing device, and the “multiple characterizations of the devil” (Hammond 32) in the various stories suggest that Poe may have considered including “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” in the seventeen-stories version of his ill-fated collection. On the publication of Poe’s *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* see Wright.

2. Although Poe wrote, in his 1840 preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, that “the epithets ‘Grotesque’ and ‘Arabesque’ will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published,” critics agree that “in spite of several conscientious efforts to extrapolate Poe’s intended definition . . . the terms remain disturbingly ambiguous” (Burwick, “Edgar Allan Poe” 423; Wright 348). While ambiguity constitutes, as we will see, the very essence of the grotesque as intended by Poe, a study of “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” in its sociocultural context and in opposition to the tenets of American transcendentalism will provide some clarifications on Poe’s use of the term.

3. For a meticulous study of the “rich visual heritage” of the aesthetic categories of the “grotesque” and the “sublime” and an analysis of their amalgamation as significant for the process of self-reflection in Poe’s works, see Burwick, “Edgar Allan Poe.” Burwick’s study provides fundamental insights on how Poe absorbed the major terms of the verbal-visual discourse on the sublime and the grotesque that had involved Edmund Burke, the Abbé Du Bos, James Harris, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Friedrich Schlegel, and Victor Hugo. Fundamental for my reading of Poe is Burwick’s argument that “the instability of the aesthetic categories picturesque, sublime, arabesque, and grotesque derives from the peculiar charge they bear to conjure specific modes of visual evocation

in language, modes which challenge, even defy rational order. . . . [These] categories [are not] discrete: one may spill over another. . . . Poe can easily generate ironic tension amidst their field of reference. Or by pushing that irony to an extreme, as Poe demonstrates in his criticism as well as in his own literary practice, all four may be made to serve satiric purposes" ("Edgar Allan Poe" 425).

4. On the grotesque as "confusion and confounding of identity" see Burwick, "Grotesque in the Romantic Movement."

5. For a detailed study of the relationship between the grotesque and related terms and modes, such as the macabre, bizarre, caricature, irony, parody, and satire, see Thomson 29–57.

6. See also Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell* (1827), where he argued that the artist must behold "man" not as grotesque or sublime but as simultaneously both (18). For a survey of the contributions on the grotesque as "copresence" of contrastive elements see Thomson 10–19, especially his reading of Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*. Thomson emphasizes the element of playfulness, combined with the horrible, that marks the grotesque in Ruskin's view. This playfulness, intended also as the urge to invent, and "manipulate" received forms and norms, is one of the defining features of Poe's use of this subversive mode (Thomson 15).

7. Consider, for example, one of Aesop's famous fables, "The Ass in the Lion's Skin": "An Ass, having put on a Lion's skin, roamed about, frightening all the silly animals he met with. Seeing a Fox, he tried to alarm him also. But Reynard, having heard his voice, said: 'Well, to be sure! And I should have been frightened, too, if I had not heard you bray.' They who assume a character that does not belong to them generally betray themselves by overacting it. So it is with the ignorant who, thanks to their magnificent appearances, would look like important people, if they were not revealed by their foolish speech" (195–96).

8. On the use of this proverb see Tolman 39.

9. Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, by far the most successful among these texts, was published uninterrupted from 1733 to 1758 and achieved record sales of up to ten thousand copies per year (Mieder, *American Proverbs* 129). By the 1840s, Martin Farquhar Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* was "as commonplace as the Bible in American homes" (LaRosa 20; Mencken 422). Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts*, a miscellaneous compilation of adages from various cultures, was a more learned text used extensively by educators and scholars to communicate effectively and persuasively.

10. Although Poe wrote "The Poetic Principle" toward the end of his life (the essay was published posthumously in 1850), its ideas had already been widely implemented in his literary production and cannot be regarded as a late development of his poetics.

11. For a detailed interpretation of proverbs as a "relatively short form of metaphorical reasoning" see Seitel 143.

12. See Thompson, *Motif-Index* J2450–J2499 (214–22).

13. Poe's derisive attacks against transcendentalism are not limited to "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." In "How to Write a *Blackwood* Article," for example, he satirizes "the tone transcendental . . . [that hints] everything—assert[s] nothing" (66). The criticism of the "so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists" at the end of "The Philosophy of Composition" is probably the most cited example (208). "Siope—a Fable" can be read as a satire of the transcendentalists, as well as a parody of such writers as Edward

Bulwer-Lytton (Wright 353). See also Casale. For a study of the satire of transcendentalism in “Ligeia” see Deutsch.

14. While Poe cites the organ of the transcendentalists explicitly, the *North American Review* humorously becomes the *North American Quarterly Humdrum*. “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” is not Poe’s sole foray into literary satire. “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.,” for example, explores “the process by which the literary establishment creates fashions, inflating some reputations and ruthlessly tomahawking others” (Galloway 9). In “How to Write a *Blackwood* Article” the narrator is a contemporary literary lady, Senora Psyche Zenobia, who meticulously sets forth a series of ludicrous poetic principles. Poe’s satire became more biting as his day-to-day struggle with poverty guided his increasing need to write and get published.

15. See also Loomis 257; and Reaver 280–83.

16. I use the term *proverb* somewhat loosely here, the general criteria for Emerson to call a verbal expression a “proverb,” “maxim,” “axiom,” “adage,” or “aphorism” being “brevity and universal implication” (LaRosa 22).

17. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic* 304. See especially the chapter devoted to “The Speaking Person in the Novel” (331–66).

CHAPTER FOUR: Fellini’s “Unoriginal” Scripts

Epigraph. Solang du Selbstgeworfnes fängst, ist alles / Geschicklichkeit und läßlicher Gewinn; / erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles, / den eine ewige Mit-Spielerin / dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau / gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen / aus Gottes großem Brücken-Bau: / erst dann ist Fangen-Können ein Vermögen,— / nich deines, einer Welt (Rilke 132). Gadamer cited Rilke’s poem as an epigraph to his *Truth and Method*.

1. Only four of Fellini’s films are based on literary sources (*Toby Dammit*, *Fellini’s Satyricon*, *Casanova*, and *La voce della luna*). Critics agree with Peter Bondanella that “they are idiosyncratic interpretations rather than true adaptations faithful to the spirit of the original text” (*The Cinema* 31). The caption “liberamente tratto” (“loosely adapted”) is included in *Toby Dammit*’s opening credits.

2. In the United States, American International Pictures (AIP) released the short film as one of a trio of shorts with the title *Spirits of the Dead* and aggressively marketed it as part of its Edgar Allan Poe horror films’ cycle. This cycle began in 1960 with *The House of Usher*, directed, as were many other films in the series, by Roger Corman.

3. According to Betti,

Il racconto di Poe [“The Tell-Tale Heart”] non lo legge neppure. Lo leggo io. . . . Non gli piace. Però non si arrende. Comincia un vertiginoso saccheggio di Poe. Una, due, tre, quattro edizioni di tutti i suoi racconti. . . . Poiché tocca a me di esporre a Federico i vari riassunti dei racconti letti, sono disorientata, a disagio. . . . Ma mi tranquillizza, tuttavia, la confortante evidenza che se Federico non se le legge da sé le novelle di Poe, tutta la faccenda deve essere ancora molto fluida, e poco importante. In seguito la faccenda diverrà precisissima, acquisterà il suo giusto peso, ma nemmeno allora Federico avrà letto e leggerà un solo racconto dello scrittore americano. (Betti 33–34)

[He does not even read Poe's tale ["The Tell-Tale Heart"]. I read it. . . . He does not like it, but does not give up. We start a dizzying raid of Poe: one, two, three, four editions of all his tales. . . . Being the one who must summarize the various stories to Federico, I feel disoriented and uneasy. . . . I am reassured by the comforting evidence that if Federico does not read the stories on his own it means that the whole deal must still be very fluid, and unimportant. Later on, things will become very clear and acquire their proper significance, but not even then will Federico read a single tale of the American writer.]

4. According to Betti,

Il montaggio dell'episodio è quasi ultimato. Federico sta pranzando in un ristorante cinese in compagnia di Nino Rota, quando, ad un tratto, cita una stupenda definizione di Poe, a proposito di Toby Dammit, che si trova verso la fine del racconto. L'entusiasmo, la gioia commossa con la quale Federico sta ora parlando dello scrittore americano non possono essere il frutto di un'occasionale evocazione; sembra piuttosto l'emozione, ancora sospesa, di un recentissimo incontro. Nino lo interrompe: "Ma scusa," "'Non scommettete la testa col diavolo,' non l'avevi . . .?" Federico quasi seccato per la frivola curiosità dell'amico: "No, ho letto il racconto ieri sera per la prima volta. È bellissimo." (58–59)

[The editing of the episode is almost complete. Federico is having lunch with Nino Rota in a Chinese restaurant, when, all of a sudden, Federico quotes a wonderful definition from Poe regarding Toby Dammit, which occurs toward the end of the story. The enthusiasm and joy with which Federico is now talking about the American writer cannot be the result of a casual evocation; they rather appear to be the still fluid emotion of a very recent encounter. Nino interrupts him: "I beg your pardon, but," "'Never Bet the Devil Your Head,'" "didn't you . . .?" Federico, almost unnerved by his friend's frivolous curiosity [replies]: "No, I read the story last night, for the first time. It's wonderful.]

5. As we will see, Fellini's film is also a rebuttal of the commonly held contention that film is unsuited to express metaphorical imagery. "Packed symbolic thinking," Bluestone stated, "[is] peculiar to imaginative rather than to visual activity" (22–23). Jonathan Miller argued that "pictures," unlike "language," cannot render explicit comparisons, and he lamented the absence of "communicative resources within the pictorial format for making [metaphorical implications] explicit" (226). Statements such as Miller's overlook the fact that film is not made of images only: dialogue and verbal matter can easily be exploited to convey explicit comparisons, if needed. More important, Miller seems to neglect the fact that the very value of metaphor (in literature as well as film) resides precisely in its condensed nature (as *similitudo brevior*), so one wonders why one should worry about film's inability to make metaphorical implications explicit in the first place. Editing, camera work, and the interactions and combinations of sounds and images are especially suited to evoke the semantic pregnancy of metaphorical thinking, thus inspiring, rather than hindering, analogical interpretations and symbolic connections.

6. On Fellini's 1968 creative crisis see Fellini, *Fellini on Fellini* 2–7.

7. "Il primo western cattolico, capisce? Il ritorno del Cristo in una desolata terra di

frontiera. Che è poi la vivente realtà dei desideri di ogni uomo: che Cristo torni a manifestarsi—lui, ossia la pace dell'anima—come una presenza concreta e tangibile. . . . Ah certo può sembrare un'idea disperata . . . che certo cinema di struttura, diciamo, può rendere questa sublime poesia con immagini elementari, dure, eloquenti nella loro povertà: inquadrature semplici, sintagmatiche, come direbbe il mio amico Roland Barthes, qualcosa fra Dreyer e Pasolini con un pizzico di Ford beninteso" (Fellini and Zapponi 75).

8. "Noi vogliamo costruire personaggi legati alla storia con un ampio retroterra sociologico, che siano densi di significati critici. Per esempio, i due fuorilegge, nel nostro film, che rappresentano? Una critica alla classe diseredata che vive la sua rivolta senza coscienza politica, in modo anarchico, troppo estemporaneo. . . . La canzonettista coi suoi seni generosi è l'illusorio rifugio nell'irrazionale. La prateria è la regione della terra "senza storia," i bisonti sono i mezzi di sostentamento per i quali l'uomo deve lottare. . . . La scorreria nel prefinale costituirà invece il tipico mezzo di evasione della violenza, al di fuori di una lotta organizzata" (Fellini and Zapponi 76).

9. Walter Foreman provides an exhaustive catalogue of the similarities between *Macbeth* and *Toby Dammit*. Both are tragedies of fate and damnation, and both present a central character who is isolated from other people. Like Macbeth, Toby is unable to "create" (instead of producing children, Macbeth kills them; Toby has not worked in a long time). Similar themes and characters pervade the two works: drunkenness (real or metaphorical), witch-figures, living at night, personal visions, decapitation (113–15).

10. Interestingly, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema* (also released in 1968 with Stamp playing the role of the "visitor") rewrites the archetypal story of Christ with references to the plot of *Shane*. On Sergio Leone's subversion of the western's ethics see Frayling.

11. See Laffay 81. It is important to note, in this respect, that Italian screenplays

differ . . . from those created within the traditional Hollywood studio system. . . . The Italian cinema has always depended on extended periods of intimate collaboration between the same directors and scriptwriters. As a result, the scriptwriter functions more as a dependent of the director than of a producer or his studio. . . . Close personal friendships and similar intellectual backgrounds usually characterize these collaborations. In addition, an Italian director almost always works with his scriptwriters throughout the creation of both stories and screenplays. . . . Italian stories and screenplays are tailor-made vehicles for an individual director working in a symbiotic relationship with scriptwriters familiar with his vision of the world and comfortable with his cinematic style and sense of humor. (Bondanella, *The Cinema* 31)

12. The Stamp-Fellini connection is justified not only by the film's inner logic but also by the fact that it was a common practice for Fellini to establish ties between himself and his protagonists, Marcello Mastroianni in particular, whom he considered an idealized copy of himself. The autobiographical quality of many of Fellini's films (*La dolce vita*, *8½*, *Roma*, and *City of Women*) has been amply discussed by numerous Fellini scholars. In the context of *Toby Dammit* see especially Bondanella, *The Cinema*; Burke; and Sharrett.

13. Interestingly, Fellini had initially offered the role to Peter O'Toole, who ended up refusing it, fearing that his image would be "compromised by such a disreputable protagonist as Toby Dammit" (Bondanella, *The Cinema* 233–34n16).

14. After appearing in several theatrical productions (including Willis Hall's wartime drama *The Long, and the Short, and the Tall*), "the boy with the stamp of a star" earned an Oscar nomination for his performance in Peter Ustinov's adaptation of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (1962) and a Best Actor Award at the Cannes Film Festival for his portrayal of a recluse psychopath in William Wyler's *The Collector* (1965). Often featured in London tabloids because of his hip lifestyle and love life, Stamp worked with John Schlesinger in his adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967) and with Pier Paolo Pasolini in *Teorema*. Toward the end of the decade Stamp's star began to fade. Michelangelo Antonioni replaced him at the last minute with David Hemmings in *Blow Up*, his film about swinging London, and after that Stamp had a harder time finding suitable roles. He turned down several offers, including the chance to play the role of harmonica player in Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968). Stamp's personal crisis drove him away from the film industry and to India for close to a decade.

15. As Christopher Sharrett has pointed out, the film's establishing shot with its color washes of the sky and clouds is a patent homage to the Corman/Poe films (126).

16. "L'aereo continuava a volare sull'aeroporto senza decidersi ad atterrare. . . . Era la prima volta che venivo a Roma, e provavo la sensazione che quel viaggio, a cui mi ero finalmente deciso, significasse qualcosa di molto importante per me. . . . Tanto che per un attimo sperai assurdamente che l'aereo invertisse la rotta e mi riportasse lontano; a casa. Ma questo era impossibile. Già gli invisibili fili dell'aeroporto avevano imprigionato l'aereo; lo attiravano irresistibilmente verso terra" (Fellini and Zapponi 71).

17. From the beginning Fellini's script emphasizes that this is a world dominated by grotesque hybrids. The plane is compared to "a captured animal" with a "monstrous muzzle" (Fellini and Zapponi 71–72).

18. See, especially, the studies by Sharrett and Burke.

19. Fellini's distaste for these power structures is evident in his casting of Father Spagna as a sly, looming, and remotely threatening presence, and of the producer, whom we see at the awards ceremony, as a Mafia-boss type. See Foreman on the producer as "Godfather" figure (116).

20. Fellini often used a yellowish hazy filter in the film to evoke smog.

21. Though this point has been made by Sharrett, Foreman, and Burke, Foreman offers the most exhaustive narrative of Toby's final decapitation as the climax of a long series of attacks on his head, attacks that suggest the inevitability of his particular demise. Initially, we see Toby protecting his head from the flashbulbs of the paparazzi. During the TV interview the monitors insulate his head or clip it off. When he stands up at the awards ceremony, the movie frame cuts his head off. In the Ferrari his head seems separated from his body and attached to the car (Foreman 115).

22. See, especially, Kayser; and Bergson, *Le rire*.

23. For this scene Fellini provides one of the most detailed descriptions in the script:

Un giardino ampio, con grandi alberi severi, e statue d'epoca romana, che biancheggiano nel buio, cone le braccia spezzate, molte senza testa. Una piccola piscina fosforescente, nella quale chioccola una cascatella d'acqua. Una lunga tavola a forma di L è stata disposta presso un alto muro romano, dove si spalancano qua e là grossi buchi. Lontano (la distanza sembrerà a Dammit invalicabile) una pedana con microfoni e attrezzi vari, sulla quale si svolgerà la cerimonia della premiazione. Fra la tavola e la pedana ci sono altri tavolini vuoti. . . . La lunga

tavola mostra le tracce di una cena che sta per finire. . . . Le persone che sono sedute a tavola sembrano la moltiplicazione di quattro o cinque tipi standard. (Fellini and Zapponi 86)

[An ample garden, with huge solemn trees and statues of the Roman era, that loom white in the darkness, with broken arms, many without their heads. A small phosphorescent pool, in which a small waterfall gurgles. A long L-shaped table has been placed near a high Roman wall, where there are random huge gaps. Far away (Dammit will regard the distance as insurmountable) a platform with microphones and other various tools, on which the awards ceremony will take place. Between the table and the platform there are other empty tables. . . . The long table shows the signs of a dinner that is about to end. . . . The people who are sitting at the table appear to be the multiplication of four or five standard types.]

24. Like the TV studio scene, the scene of the awards ceremony highlights the dissonance between narrative and mise-en-scène. For example, the many references to Christian and pagan gods (the space of the aesthetic sublime) turn into grotesques in this Roman theater, where Toby is asked to represent Mars, the god of war, in a series of nude pictures. His wane and androgynous physique is ill suited to the task.

25. Lombardi's prophetic intimations may be compared to the proleptic and analogical hints that Fellini conveyed through the formal choices that I discussed in previous scenes. On Fellini's self-conscious views of the director as puppet master see Bondanella, *The Cinema*.

26. "prospettive teatrali [e] misteriose" (Fellini and Zapponi 94).

27. Malcolm LeGrice suggests the useful differentiation between the "suspension of disbelief" required by the conventional artifice of scenery and stage in theater, and the "suppression of disbelief" that the immediacy and photographic realism of cinema demands (230).

CHAPTER FIVE: India through the Looking Glass

Epigraph. En el vocabulario crítico, la palabra *precursor* es indispensable, pero habría que tratar de purificarla de toda connotación de polémica o de rivalidad. El echo es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro ("Kafka y sus precursores").

1. On Tabucchi's intertextual and citational narratives see Pezzini; Ammirati; and Gaglianone. See also Tabucchi's own comments on the presence in his fiction of James, Kipling, Stevenson, Borges, Cortazar, Svevo, Pirandello, Fitzgerald, Pessoa, and Calvino in his interview with Andrea Borsari (Tabucchi, "Cos'è una vita se non viene raccontata?" 10–13). On the Bakhtinian heteroglossia of Tabucchi's novels see Petri.

2. A direct reference, perhaps, to the Borges of "El acercamiento a Almotásim" ("The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim,"), where "la identidad del buscado y del buscador" ("the identity of the one who searches and the one who is searched for") converge at the end of the quest (Alazraki, *La prosa* 63).

3. "Questo libro, oltre che un'insonnia, è un viaggio. L'insonnia appartiene a chi ha scritto il libro, il viaggio a chi lo fece" (*Notturmo indiano* [hereafter *Ni*] 9).

4. "quasi sconosciut[e] in Occidente" (*Ni* 77).

5. Tabucchi's (pseudo-)topographical accuracy—each destination of the protagonist's trip is rendered with captions that name specific locations in India—emphasizes, by ironic contrast, the progressive dissolution of solid, stable, and “clear” referential data that marks Rossignol's uncanny nocturnal itineraries.

6. See Della Coletta, “Transtextual Narratives.”

7. “L'Occidentale che ritorna in India non riconosce più la sua cuna” (“La danza d'una 'Devadasis,'” [Gozzano, *Verso la cuna del mondo* 58]). In *Universal Histories* (such as those by Bossuet, Herder, Bayle, Voltaire, Michelet, and Cantu, just to name a few), the “beginning” of the historical plot is the inaugural moment that offers a foundational meaning to the process of historical becoming. In other words, the inaugural moment has not only the right of precedence on an ordered sequence of historical facts but becomes the agent and primary cause that contains the reasons for the present and the logic of the future. The inaugural moment defines the metahistorical principles and the narrative structures that give shape and meaning to the multiplicity of historical events. Voltaire, for example, followed the “great people from the cradle to the tomb” by producing a systematic design that reduced the enigma of history to a clear philosophical method, a diagram drafted according to specific ideological coordinates. To the precariousness of single individuals, ephemeral citizens of the present, *Universal Histories* opposed a panoramic view of the world. Voltaire's lofty vantage point allowed him to produce grand temporal and geographical syntheses. Similarly, in the introduction to his monumental *Histoire universelle*, Michelet singled out “le point de départ, dans l'Inde, au berceau des races et des religions, *the womb of the world*” (“the starting point, in India, at the cradle of races and civilizations, the womb of the world”) (229–30) to confirm the Hegelian idea of the progressive liberation of the universal Spirit in the world of history. From a primeval and feminine India to a Europe that displays its virile *raison*, *Universal Histories* drafted the trajectory that justified the West's imperial and colonizing journey back to a land that is interpreted as waiting to be reintegrated into humanity's progressive narrative.

8. “il fratello sconosciuto di un amico dimenticato” (“Goa” 29).

9. “tutto è crollato” (“Goa” 25–26).

10. “Nessuno conosce Vico Verani. . . . La solitudine mi par più completa, . . . ora che so di aver seguita la traccia d'un morto nella città morta” (“Goa” 27).

11. “pellegrinaggio, . . . ma non nel senso religioso del termine . . . , un itinerario privato” (*Ni* 41).

12. “i percorsi incongrui” (*Ni* 9).

13. “È molto difficile avere uno sguardo totalizzante, unitario su una realtà così composita e complessa e direi piena di buchi come la nostra. . . . In questo mondo diventato assolutamente relativo anche la scrittura diventa relativa e anche la rappresentazione della realtà diventa relativa” (“Dibattito” 155).

14. “L'India è misteriosa per definizione” (*Ni* 47).

15. “Perché [Xavier] è finito in questo posto?” chiesi. “Cosa ci faceva? Dov'è ora?” (*Ni* 19).

16. “‘Senta,’ dissi io, ‘mi racconti tutto con calma, tutto quello che ricorda, tutto quello che può dirmi.’ . . . Fu un racconto lungo, prolisso, pieno di dettagli.” (“Listen,” I said, “tell me everything, take your time, everything you remember, everything you can tell me.” . . . It was a long, rambling story, full of details) (*Ni* 21; *IN* 11).

17. “Da lontano veniva una voce lenta e monotona, forse una preghiera oppure

un lamento solitario e senza speranza. . . . Per me era impossibile decifrarlo. L'India era anche questo: un universo di suoni piatti, indifferenziati, indistinguibili" (Ni 38).

18. "[Avevo] la perfetta sensazione di essere solo due occhi che guardavano mentre io ero altrove, senza sapere dove" (Ni 37).

19. On the "temporalization of space" as the narrative technique typical of "cinematographic fiction" that creates "a dynamic, discontinuous space that [is] no longer stable and continuous" but is charged with the qualities of motion, discontinuity, dislocation, and even adventitiousness, see Spiegel 162–82. For Tabucchi's comments on the influence of cinema on his narrative style (a style of "cuts" and "montage") see "Cos'è una vita?" 10. On Tabucchi's "film novels" see also Spunta.

20. "Tu sei un altro."

"Ah sì," dissi io, "chi sono?"

. . . "Questo non importa," . . . "è solo *maya*."

"E che cos'è *maya*?"

"È l'apparenza del mondo . . . ma è solo illusione, quello che conta è l'*atma*."

. . .

"E l'*atma* che cos'è?" . . .

"*The Soul*" disse "L'anima individuale."

. . . "E allora se io sono un altro vorrei sapere dov'è il mio *atma*, dove si trova ora." . . .

"Sei su una barca" (Ni 69–70).

21. See the introduction to Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (3–25).

22. "Immerse le braccia . . . fra i pezzi di carta. 'Quanti uomini,' disse. . . . 'Polvere'" (Ni 27).

23. "Credo che un suo antenato fosse di Goa" (Ni 23).

24. "[Xavier] è un portoghese ma non è venuto a fare il missionario, è un portoghese che si è perduto in India" (Ni 23).

25. "Era una domanda semplice e pratica, ma io inciampai nella risposta, perché anch'io sentii il peso della memoria, e nello stesso tempo la sua inadeguatezza. Cosa si ricorda di un viso in fondo? No, non avevo una fotografia, avevo solo il mio ricordo: e il mio ricordo era solo mio, non era descrivibile, era l'espressione che io avevo del volto di Xavier. Feci uno sforzo e dissi: 'è un uomo alto quanto me, magro, con i capelli lisci, ha circa la mia età'" (Ni 25).

26. "No, per favore, . . . non gli dica niente" (Ni 32).

27. "E chi è Xavier?" . . .

"Xavier è mio fratello," mentii.

. . . "Xavier non esiste," disse, "è solo un fantasma." Fece un gesto che abbracciò la stanza. "Siamo tutti morti, non l'ha ancora capito? Io sono morto, e questa città è morta, e le battaglie, il sudore, il sangue, la gloria e il mio potere: è tutto morto, niente è servito a niente."

"No," dissi io, "qualcosa resta sempre."

"Che cosa?" fece lui. "Il suo ricordo? La vostra memoria? Questi libri?"

Fece un passo verso di me e . . . spinse con uno stivale un piccolo fagotto che stava ai suoi piedi, e io vidi che era un topo morto. Egli spostò la bestia sul pavimento e mormorò con scherno: "oppure questo topo?" Rise ancora, e la sue risata mi gelò il sangue. "Io sono il pifferaio di Hamelin!" gridò. Poi la sua voce diventò affabile, mi chiamò professore. (Ni 79)

28. La camera era imponente . . . le finestre si aprivano sul mare d'Oman . . . le pesanti tende di velluto verde scorrevano dolci e morbide come un sipario, io le feci scorrere sul paesaggio e la camera fu solo penombra e silenzio, il ronzio pigro e confortante del ventilatore mi cullò . . . e arrivai subito a una vecchia cappella su un colle mediterraneo. . . . Vedevo quella scena lontana. . . . Ricordai . . . i nomi che ci eravamo dati, la chitarra di Xavier e la voce squillante di Magda che annunciava con ironica gravità, imitando gli imbonitori delle fiere: signore e signori un po' di attenzione, abbiamo con noi l'Usignolo italiano! E io che stavo al gioco e attaccavo vecchie canzoni napoletane, imitando i gorgheggi antiquati dei cantanti di altri tempi mentre tutto ridevano e applaudivano. Fra noi ero Roux, e mi ero rassegnato: iniziale di Rouxinol, in portoghese usignolo. (Ni 35–36)

29. For a broader discussion of the presence of dreams in Tabucchi's oeuvre see Lepschy.

30. "sono diventato un uccello notturno" (Ni 59).

31. "Stava sorgendo la luna. Aveva un alone giallo intorno ed era piena e sanguigna. Io pensai: luna rossa. E mi venne istintivamente da fischiare una vecchia canzone. L'idea arrivò come un corto circuito. Pensai a un nome, Roux, e subito alle parole di Xavier: sono diventato un uccello notturno; e allora tutto mi parve così evidente" (Ni 90).

32. Interestingly, the narrator had suggested that Xavier had worked as a simultaneous interpreter.

33. The "Thou," Gadamer writes, "is not an object; it relates itself to us. . . . The *experience of the Thou* must be special because the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us" (*Truth* 352). For Gadamer the involvement of the "I" in the "Thou" (and vice versa) is fundamental in the hermeneutical encounter and never implies the potential loss of self that is at stake in Tabucchi's more radical questioning of identity and (self-)understanding.

34. "Lei cosa fa?" . . .

"Mah, supponiamo che stia scrivendo un libro, per esempio."

"Un libro come?"

"Un libro."

"Romanzo?" chiese Christine con gli occhi furbi.

"Una cosa simile."

"Allora è un romanziere," disse lei con una certa logica.

"Oh no," dissi io, "sarebbe solo un'esperienza, il mio mestiere è un altro, cerco topi morti."

"Come ha detto?!"

"Scherzavo," dissi io. "Frugo in vecchi archivi, cerco cronache antiche, cose inghiottite dal tempo. È il mio mestiere, lo chiamo topi morti." . . .

"Mi racconti il romanzo, forza," disse lei.

"Ma non è un romanzo," protestai io, "è un pezzo qua e uno là, non c'è neppure una vera storia, sono solo frammenti di una storia" (Ni 99–101).

35. "Nel libro io sarei uno che si è perso un India," dissi rapidamente, "il concetto è questo."

"Eh no," disse Christine, "non basta, non se la può cavare così, la sostanza non può essere *semplicemente* questa."

“La sostanza è che in questo libro io sono uno che si è perso in India,” ripetei, “mettiamola così. C’è un altro che mi sta cercando, ma io non ho nessuna intenzione di farmi trovare. Io l’ho visto arrivare, l’ho seguito giorno per giorno, potrei dire. Conosco le sue preferenze e le sue diffidenze, le sue generosità e le sue paure. Lo tengo praticamante sotto controllo. Lui, al contrario, di me non sa quasi niente. Ha qualche vaga traccia: una lettera, delle testimonianze confuse o reticenti, un bigliettino molto generico: segnali, pezzetti che tenta faticosamente di appiccicare insieme.”

“Ma lei chi è?” chiese Christine, “voglio dire nel libro.”

“Questo non viene detto,” risposi, “sono uno che non vuole farsi trovare, dunque non fa parte del gioco dire chi è.”

“E quello che la cerca . . . perchè la sta cercando con tanta insistenza?”

“Chi lo sa,” dissi io, “è difficile saperlo, questo non lo so neppure io che scrivo. Forse cerca un passato, una risposta a qualcosa. Forse vorrebbe afferrare qualcosa che un tempo gli sfuggì. In qualche modo sta cercando se stesso. Voglio dire, è come se cercasse se stesso, cercando me: nei libri succede spesso così, è letteratura.” (Ni 102–3).

36. “Era un ingradingimento, la foto riproduceva un giovane negro, solo il busto; una canottiera con una scritta pubblicitaria, un corpo atletico, sul viso l’espressione di un grande sforzo, le mani alzate come in segno di vittoria: sta evidentemente tagliando il traguardo, per esempio i cento metri” (Ni 101).

37. “Sulla sinistra c’è un poliziotto vestito da marziano, ha un casco di plexiglas sul viso, gli stivaletti alti, un moschetto imbracciato. Gli occhi feroci sotto la sua visiera feroce. Sta sparando al negro. E il negro sta scappando a braccia alzate ma è già morto” (Ni 102).

38. “giudizi fort[i]” (Tabucchi, “Incontro” 654, 659). For a connection with Gianni Vattimo’s thought see Vattimo and Rovatti, “Dialettica differenza, pensiero debole.”

39. One of the participants in the “Incontro” with Tabucchi held in Leuven, Belgium, in May 1993, asked: “Può essere una caratteristica della narrativa di questi ultimi anni questo senso di non-conoscenza, di riflettere la non-conoscenza nella scrittura?” (“Incontro” 655).

40. “Credo che il mondo non esisterebbe senza la possibilità di essere narrato. O meglio, esiste proprio perchè è narrabile” (“I believe that the world would not exist without the possibility of being told in narrative form. Or, better, the world exists precisely because it can be narrated”) (“Cos’è una vita?” 6).

41. “la letteratura odierna [nasce] da una grande voglia di far chiarezza, ma anche da una situazione un po’ paradossale: che la chiarezza non si può fare” (“contemporary literature [emerges] from a great desire to make things clear, but also from a rather paradoxical situation: that one cannot make things clear”) (“Incontro” 655). Tabucchi humorously dismantled the hermeneutical dogmatism of all master narratives, with their monological thrust toward ending and closure, with the story of “un pollo arrosto che veniva mangiato in pubblico da un personaggio altolocato. Mi resi conto che questo tema . . . si poteva raccontare in molti modi. Mi divertii a sceglierne alcuni: alla fine non c’era più neanche il pollo” (“a roasted chicken that a very prominent man was eating in public. I realized that I could narrate this topic . . . in many different ways. I had fun selecting some: at the end, even the chicken had disappeared”) (“Incontro” 656).

42. “paludi, sconosciute diramazioni e inquietanti criteri di intendere il rapporto

con se stessi e con gli altri" ("Un baule" 22). On Tabucchi's appropriation of Pessoa's "teoria eteronimica" (theory of heteronyms) in order to disrupt the linear relationship between self and other see Francese 132–33.

43. With an implicit reference to Borges's "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," Charles D. Klopp argues that in *Notturmo indiano* "the roles of miscreant and investigator, judge and accused, hero and villain are interchangeable, not fixed, and it is pointless as well as uncharitable to attempt to divide humankind into sinners on the one hand and sinned against on the other" (334). On the relationship between the urge toward ethical commitment on the one hand, and the refusal of all forms of ideological totality and authoritarian ethos on the other, see also the chapters herein on Corneau, Borges, and Bertolucci.

44. "Je crois que *Notturmo indiano* à la fin est un non-livre. C'est un livre qui évite la solution, la narration" ("Incontro" 658). See also Tabucchi's interview with Andrea Borsari: "A me è sempre piaciuta una letteratura interrogativa che, piuttosto che dare delle risposte, pone delle domande" ("I have always liked a literature of interrogations; a literature that asks questions rather than give[s] answers") ("Cos'è una vita?" 8).

CHAPTER SIX: "A Cinema of Quotations"

1. "Non conoscevo Bombay, ma cercavo di seguire il percorso con la cartina che tenevo sulle ginocchia" (*Ni* 14).

2. For example, the *Variety* reviewer wrote: "[*Nocturne indien*] is unusually faithful in structure—even retaining the precise identification of locations, here placed in intertitles—and makes generous use of Tabucchi's terse dialogue" ("*Nocturne indien*" 31). On Corneau's definition of a "passage to cinema" see Corneau, "*Nocturne indien*: India Blues" 54. See also Corneau, "Entretien" 34.

3. On the cinematic elements of fiction, especially on "extensive attempts at the creation of film-mimetic literary passages" and the construction "of a narrative action that can be seen," see Moses (xviii); Spiegel (28); and Stam ("Beyond Fidelity" 74–76). See also Micciché, *La ragione* 161; and Goodman 311–14. For a definition of *adaptogenic* see Groensteen and Gaudreault 270; for *cinemorphic* see Marcus 2.

4. I use the term *writerly* here not merely in the sense of something dealing with written language and therefore opposed to "cinematic." On the contrary, just like a cinematic adaptation, a writerly text is a text that can be "rewritten"—something that invites the reader or viewer to become a "producer" rather than mere "consumer" of the text (Barthes, *S/Z* 4).

5. From a similar perspective, Neil Sinyard compares the adaptive process to a critical essay: "Like a critical essay, the film adaptation selects some episodes, excludes others, offers preferred alternatives. It focuses on specific areas of the novel, expands or contracts detail. . . . In the process, like the best criticism, it can throw new light on the original" (117).

6. " 'Noir-polar,' c'est . . . le gouffre, le trou sans fond, la nuit où tous les chats sont gris, où tout est possible. . . . Face aux clartés, affirmations, définitions positives, happy ends [*sic*] et autres catégories identificatrices rassurantes, le polar est là qui veille, attendant de plein fouet ou corrompant dans l'obscurité. Eclatements d'identités, dédoublements, pertes de soi-même, retournements brutaux, '*dangerous grounds*' (Nicholas Ray),

vertiges sournois ou violents, il y a de quoi rendre tous les autres films malades, même quand ceux-ci tentent de préserver leur belle santé par des habitudes bien ‘bourgeoises,’ bien réglées” (5). In an interview with Jean-Jacques Bernard, Corneau identified the similarities between his previous films and *Nocturne indien*, arguing it is a film noir: “C’est . . . une enquête, et il y a au cœur du sujet, un thème qui m’obsède apparemment au cinéma—puisque je m’en rends compte après chaque film—, c’est la recherche d’identité” (“It is . . . an investigation, and at the heart of the story there is a theme that apparently obsesses me in cinema—since I become aware of it after every movie—, it is the search for identity”) (Corneau, “*Nocturne indien*: India Blues” 54).

7. “comme sortant des limbes du subconscient” (Garel 18).

8. Discussing his acting directions to Andrade, Corneau explained to Bernard: “Il n’y avait plus qu’à lui dire ‘moins, moins, moins . . .’ et il gardait cette charge. C’était formidable. En très peu de jours, il est devenu un virtuose de cette délicatesse presque millimétrique du jeu” (“I only had to tell him ‘less, less, less . . .’ and he maintained this mission. It was formidable. In just a few days, he has become a virtuoso of this almost millimetrical subtlety of performance”) (Corneau, “*Nocturne indien*: India Blues” 54).

9. In Garel’s words,

La visite à cette statue . . . équivaut pour ledit protagoniste à une traversée du miroir. Jusqu’alors, il était en Inde sans pour autant y être vraiment: Bombay, quoique orientale jusque dans ses moindres recoins, est la ville la plus occidentale de l’Inde; elle est la porte de l’Inde, comme le symbolise le monument (The Gateway of India) situé quasiment à la pointe de la presqu’île et d’où l’on s’embarque justement pour l’île d’Elephanta. Jusqu’alors, les rencontres qu’il faisait étaient provoquées par lui, étaient rationnelles, procédaient d’une démarche logique. Jusqu’alors, son action, quoiqu’ayant un but, donc étant orientée vers l’avenir, avait un point d’ancrage, était enracinée, relevait du passé, de la mémoire. (Garel 18)

10. “Parti à la recherche d’un ami qui s’est perdu en Inde, . . . il va s’y perdre (de) lui-même à son tour” (Garel 18).

11. The film shows repeated shots of Rossignol retreating from the noise, heat, light, and crowds of India.

12. “[*Nocturne indien*] est un film très européen” (39).

13. “la seule manière [dont un Européen] peut parler de l’Inde est à travers le regard d’un Occidental” (“Histoire d’un film”). Commenting about his musical choices, Corneau explained: “Bien que je sois un très grand amateur de musique indienne, j’ai su tout de suite qu’il n’allait pratiquement pas y en avoir [in *Nocturne indien*]” (“Though I am a big fan of Indian music, I immediately knew that there would be practically none [in *Nocturne indien*]”) (Corneau, “Entretien” 39).

14. Corneau argued that Schubert’s music ruled his inspiration for the film from the start: “Cette musique est liée au film depuis le début du projet. J’ai écrit le scénario en écoutant l’adagio de ce *Quintette*. . . . Il amène sa propre musique avec lui, mais pas une musique de film au sens dramatique ou décoratif du terme. . . . Cet adagio, qui est sans doute ce qui Schubert a écrit lorsqu’il était le plus près de la mort, était quelque chose dont j’avais besoin” (“This music is tied to the film from the beginning of the project. I wrote the script while listening to the adagio of this Quintet. . . . The scenario brings

its music with it, but it is not a cinematic music in the dramatic or decorative sense of the word. . . . This adagio, which undoubtedly is the piece that Schubert wrote when he was closest to his death, was something that I needed") (Corneau, "Entretien" 39).

15. Philippe Niel makes an interesting connection between visual and musical elements in the film: "C'est bien d'abord une musicalité de nocturne qui nous est rendue sensible dans *Nocturne indien*, et ce par le procédé de panneaux au noir sur lesquels apparaissent en lettres blanches les noms des lieux où va se dérouler la séquence qui vient. Ce n'est pas tant l'exactitude topographique qui nous importe, que l'utilisation du noir à des fins de rythme insufflé à l'image; ce noir qui d'un 'point de vue' colorimétrique est bien constitué de l'absence de toute lumière et par conséquent de toute couleur" ("First of all, the musicality of a nocturne is made visible in *Nocturne indien* with the use of black screens upon which are superimposed the names of the places in which the following sequence will take place. Topographical precision is not important, what matters is the use of black to endow the images with a certain rhythm; from the 'point of view' of colorimetry this black is made by the absence of all light and by consequence of all color") (32).

16. On the use of fixed shots, Corneau stated: "Cette rigueur des plans-séquences fixes [créa] un sentiment de durée comme je n'en ai jamais eu. . . . Le plan-séquence est un peu l'idéal quasi mystique de beaucoup de metteurs en scène. C'est une des choses les plus ingrates du cinéma, mais c'était là une volonté délibérée de ma part. Toutes ces discussions dans cette espèce de 'road-movie statique,' d'un endroit à l'autre, d'un personnage à l'autre, sans espoir de retour, on pouvait les filmer avec des travelling de mouvements séduisants" ("This rigor of fixed shots [created] a feeling of temporal duration such as I have never experienced. . . . The fixed shot is a bit like a quasi-mystical ideal for many directors. It is one of the most unrewarding things in cinema, but it was the result of a deliberate decision on my part. All the discussions in this kind of 'static road movie,' from one place to another, and one character to another, without hope of going back, I could have filmed them with tracking shots and charming camera movements") (Corneau, "*Nocturne indien*: India Blues" 55).

17. If in Tabucchi the mystery of the self approaches its solution in the temple of Western imperialism, Corneau completely reverses this scenario. In the monastery cathedral in Goa Rossignol's view of Christ on the cross elicits a panic attack, and he flees, while a marchlike music echoes in the background.

18. In several films Schubert's intimate adagio is used as the background for poignant scenes, such as that of bomb-ravaged, death-engulfed Germany at the end of World War II, in *István Szabó's Taking Sides* (2001) and in Frank Pierson's *Conspiracy* (2001), a film dealing with the Wannsee Conference and the Third Reich's "final solution."

19. "This statue represents the circle of Life through which the whole waste, the whole dirt, everything inferior and sick needs to pass through in order to reach a higher sphere of life—beauty. I hope that you too one day and in a later life will be reincarnated to belong to a Master race."

20. "il giornale menzionava alcuni servizi resi nella catalogazione del locale museo e riportava la fotografia di uno sconosciuto: il viso di un vecchio calvo, con gli occhi chiari e la bocca sottile" (Tabucchi, "I treni" 116).

21. Interestingly, as an interpreter of Dravidian art, the Schlemihl of Madras preached a gospel of multiplicity and relativity. As a reader of Chamisso he tells a story of unitary and absolute selfhood when he mistakenly concludes that "Peter Schlemihl

will end up finding his shadow again.” The two hermeneutic positions are as untenable as his ontological ones.

22. Though Chamisso was familiar with some of the Yiddish renditions of the archetypical character of the *schlemiel*, critics generally agree that he borrowed “little more than the name for [a] creation” that was much more closely tied to the Faust legend (Pinsker 7). Corneau revised this dismissive interpretation by connecting Chamisso’s biographical experiences of displacement and flight with the tradition that sees the *schlemiel* as the “quintessential outsider,” the perennial wanderer in a hostile world (Pinsker 7). See also Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the *schlemiel* as pariah in “The Jew as Pariah.”

23. In the French original: “Le corps humain pourrait bien n’être qu’une apparence. Il cache notre réalité. Il s’épaissit sur notre lumière ou sur notre ombre” (659).

24. “L’erreur commune c’est de prendre l’être extérieur pour l’être réel” (659).

25. “la réalité c’est l’âme” (659).

26. “Mais j’aurais fait une erreur profonde. Il fallait quelqu’un qui joue, qui investisse le personnage de ses propres ambiguïtés. Et puis, en fait, c’est un film sur les acteurs. Car l’acteur est exactement au centre du sujet de ce film dans ses changements permanents” (“*Nocturne Indien: India Blues*” 54).

27. Scholars such as Simon N. Herman, author of *Jewish Identity*, would argue that it is possible, and in fact imperative, to issue a “normative statement of what Jewish identity means and what form it ought to take” (Kelman 9). Herman engages in a social-psychological analysis that subsumes the study of “the nature of Jewish identity and of the forces which go into its shaping” to the identification of “the factors calculated to preserve that identity” (20). Steyn takes a stance against such “naturalization” of Jewry and advocates a nonessentialist perspective. The two positions are not as dichotomous as it would appear. Herman is the first to acknowledge that Jewry has “to be studied as the living, changing organism that it is” (21). “An identity,” he argues, “does not exist as something completely preformed; as they make the choices in life which commit them to certain attitudes and courses of action, individuals and groups are engaged in a creative process of building up an identity.” By adhering to both an empirical and a normative definition of *identity*, Herman acknowledges the diversity of Jewish identities (especially after the Emancipation and the migrations of the latter part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), as well as the existence “of elements of quintessential sameness [that] characterize the Jewish identity in different climes and periods” (63).

28. As Herman points out, this implies accepting the paradox that the identity of “so dispersed a people as the Jew” could be spoken of “as existing everywhere as a uniform entity” (81).

29. See Davis.

30. On the definition of Jewish identity according to religious law (the “halacha”), and recent debates about the interpretation of the law, see Herman 75–83.

31. “[Le destin de Schlemihl] . . . avec sa perte d’identité due au nazisme et cette espèce de redéfinition d’identité à cause du nazisme, c’est peut-être aussi une des explications de la totalité du film. J’associe très souvent le personnage de Jean-Hugues Anglade à cette façon d’être qui est sensuellement prise en charge par Schlemihl. . . . Lui Schlemihl, comme Rossignol, est en déplacement” (Corneau, “Entretien avec Alain Corneau.” 35).

32. Herman regrets that one should feel the need “to undertake an act of formal

definition” of the Jewish identity rather than allow “the process of historical evolution to produce its own definitions” (82). He is also keen to point out, however, that “there can be no proper understanding of contemporary Jewish identity” without a definition of the profound impact that the Holocaust had on this identity (87). “The reaction to the Holocaust,” Herman continues, “has been—and must continue to be—a stiffening of the determination to strengthen Jewish life, to consolidate the Jewish state, and actively change the conditions under which such tragedy could occur” (111).

33. Corneau peppers his shots with ideas of uncanny doublings: identical people eating at the restaurant, sleeping in a train station. Rossignol’s view of Bombay’s train station, with its crowds of sleeping travelers, repeats the subjective shots in the hospital and establishes a disturbing analogy between the living and the dead. Vimala is doubled in Christine, “une sorte de prostituée en ‘négatif’ [qui] parlant de son métier . . . dit ‘On me paie pour ça’” (“a kind of prostitute in ‘negative’ [who] speaking about her job . . . says ‘I get paid to do it’”) (Niel 33).

34. One can only think of Schubert’s *Lieb*, “Der Doppelgänger.”

35. As in my reading of Poe’s “The Black Cat,” I am using the term *marvelous* to define, with Todorov, the literary genre that deals with supernatural events in a reality governed “by laws unknown to us” (*The Fantastic* 25).

36. “justement si vous voulez savoir la fin, il faut que je vous *la montre en vrai sur place*, je ne peux pas simplement la raconter” (emphasis added).

37. “Voilà, ce serait, mettons, dans cet hôtel, un soir comme ce soir, chaud et parfumé, moi je serais en train de dîner avec une jolie femme, quelqu’un comme vous, par exemple. Nous sommes à cette table ici, et puis, à un certain moment . . . je le vois lui, là bas, à la table où nous étions nous mêmes tout à l’heure. Lui aussi il était avec une femme, je ne vois qu’eux deux, elle me rappelle une femme, deux femmes même, lui, il me regarde sans bouger, a l’air content, il me sourit.”

38. “le transfert de personnalité du protagoniste, l’ultime phase de la dissolution de sa personnalité avant qu’il ne franchisse la dernière étape de sa traversée du miroir” (20).

39. “un Parisien, un touriste dans un lieu de vacance qui parle français.” On the film’s multiple languages see also Corneau’s comments in his interview with Jean A. Gili (Corneau, “Entretien” 38).

40. “[Rossignol] est l’image rêvée du voyageur d’aujourd’hui. Il a un vrai regard mais il garde son identité. Simplement, peut-être parce qu’elle n’est pas sûre” (Corneau, “*Noc-turne indien: India Blues*” 55).

41. “il reale senza cornice è sempre un’altra cosa” (Ni 15).

42. In his preface to Roderick Hudson, James argued: “Really, universally, relations stop nowhere . . . and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so” (171–72).

43. This is precisely Bakhtin’s view of the “heteroglossia that rages beyond the boundaries of . . . a sealed-off cultural universe, a universe having its own literary language. . . . It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology . . . and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict” (*The Dialogic* 368).

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Writer in the Looking Glass

1. For a meticulous analysis of intertextuality in Borges's oeuvre see Alazraki, *Versions* and "El texto como palimpsesto." Useful readings of "Tema" are provided by Barrenechea; Whiston; Juan-Navarro; Zubizarreta; and Alazraki, *La prosa* 86–88. See, especially, Molloy for an interpretation of the story as based on "deferral and interpolation" (35–39). On the "several layers of reflection" in "Tema" see De Man 127.

2. "¿No es portentoso que en la noche 602 el rey Shahriar oiga de boca de la reina su propia historia? A imitación del marco general, un cuento suele contener otros cuentos . . . : escenas dentro de la escena como en la tragedia de *Hamlet*. . . ¿Qué no haría un hombre, un Kafka, que organizara y acentuara esos juegos, que los rehiciera según la deformación alemana, según la *Unheimlichkeit* de Alemania?" ("Los traductores de *Las 1001 noches*" 413).

3. I found no reference to other readings of "Tema" according to Freud's theory of the uncanny. Only a few scholars have developed this connection in other stories by Borges. Silvia Molloy devotes a section of her *Signs of Borges* to "The Uncanny Distortion" 77–79. James Winchell reads Borges's "Pascal Sphere" as the uncanny representation of "the subject's fear before God" (517). Heather L. Dubnick offers an inspiring reading of Borges's "extrañas ambigüedades" ("strange ambiguities") as the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, self and other, real readers and fictional characters, past and present. These ambiguities, and the doublings and repetitions they create, Dubnick claims, are the sources of the anxiety typical of the uncanny in stories such as "El Aleph," "Las ruinas circulares," "El Sur," and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

4. The subhead for this section is a citation from Borges's essay "On Chesterton," which contains Borges's most extensive discussion of the uncanny. Borges wrote that "something in the makeup of [Chesterton's] personality leaned toward the nightmarish, something secret, and blind, and central" (84). Borges understood Chesterton's uncanny thus: "He defines the near by the far, and even by the atrocious" (83). Similar comments on the uncanny appear in "About William Beckford's *Vathek*."

5. In Freud's words:

Among its different shades of meaning the word "*heimlich*" exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, "*unheimlich*." What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*. . . . In general we are reminded that the word "*heimlich*" is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. "*Unheimlich*" is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of "*heimlich*" and not of the second. . . . On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something, which throws quite a new light on the concept of the *Unheimlich* for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. ("The Uncanny" 224–25)

6. See Freud, "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words" 156–58. For a reading of the convergence of opposite meanings in a single word see also Todd.

7. I use the term *chronotope* according to Bakhtin's definition: "Chronotopes are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events in the novel. The chrono-

tope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. . . . The chronotope function[s] as the primary means for materializing time in space" (*The Dialogic* 250). On Borges as fictional persona see Scholes, "A Commentary" 84.

8. "La acción transcurre en un país oprimido y tenaz: Polonia, Irlanda, la república de Venecia, algún estado sudamericano o balcánico. . . . Ha transcurrido, mejor dicho, pues aunque el narrador es contemporáneo, la historia referida por él ocurrió al promediar o al empezar del siglo XIX. Digamos (para comodidad narrativa) Irlanda; digamos 1824" ("Tema" 496).

9. For a more extended reading of how Borges's characters and specificities of time and space serve to develop archetypal ideas, emblematic situations, discursive procedures, and paradoxes see Molloy. See also Alazraki, *Versiones* 90; Alazraki, *La prosa* 17; and Varas 95.

10. "pormenores, rectificaciones, ajustes" ("Tema" 496).

11. "hoy . . . la vislumbro así" ("Tema" 496).

12. "Hay zonas de la historia que no me fueron reveladas aún" ("Tema" 143).

13. For different readings of the "unreliable narrator" in "Tema" see Prieto and de Juano. For more general comments on Borges's deliberate attenuation of authorial omniscience in his fiction see Shaw 71.

14. Freud writes:

We have characters that are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy—, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. . . . And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing—the repetition of the same feature or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations. (Freud, "The Uncanny" 234)

15. Freud was shaping his theory of the *Todestrieb*, the death drive, which he proposed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published in 1920, one year after the essay on the uncanny.

16. Susan Bernstein convincingly discusses the similarity between the relation that Heidegger establishes between *Sein* and *Nichts* in "Sur Seinfrage" ("On the Question of Being") and that between *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich* in Freud's essay (1116). On Heidegger and the uncanny see also Weber, "Uncanny Thinking" 22–31.

17. "El narrador se llama Ryan" ("Tema" 496).

18. "del joven, del heroico, del bello, del asesinado Fergus Kilpatrick, cuyo sepulcro fue misteriosamente violado, cuyo nombre ilustra los versos de Browning y de Hugo, cuya estatua preside un cerro gris entre ciénagas rojas" ("Tema" 496).

19. "Kilpatrick fue un conspirador, un secreto y glorioso capitán de conspiradores; a semejanza de Moisés que, desde la tierra de Moab, divisó y no pudo pisar la tierra prometida, Kilpatrick pereció en la víspera de la rebelión victoriosa que había premeditado y soñado" ("Tema" 496).

20. For a very perceptive reading of Borges's use of adjectives see Shaw 70–77.

21. “empaña su buen crédito, ya que tal vez lo hizo matar la misma policía” (“Tema” 496).

22. “rebaso lo puramente policial” (“Tema” 496).

23. “una secreta forma del tiempo, un dibujo de líneas que se repiten” (“Tema” 497).

24. “parecen repetir o combinar hechos de remotas regiones, de remotas edades” (“Tema” 496).

25. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” Freud famously introduced his theory of the compulsion to repeat, a theory based on his observation of subjects who persistently repeated certain activities even though they associated them with feelings of unpleasure rather than gratification.

26. See also Hertz 301. This need for repetition is the expression of the most basic character of the instincts, their conservatism: “*an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*” (“Beyond” 612). This urge, Freud surmised, is the death drive, the return to the inanimate stage that preceded the beginning of life. Freud thus proposes the paradoxical conclusion that “*the aim of all life is death*” (“Beyond” 613).

27. See Cixous’s eloquent interpretation of Freud’s connection between the unrepresentable core of the uncanny and death: “‘Death’ does not have any form in life. Our unconscious makes no place for the representation of our mortality. As an impossible representation, death is that which mimes, by this very impossibility, the reality of death. It goes even further. That which signifies without that which is signified” (543).

28. “Así, nadie ignora que los esbirros que examinaron el cadáver del héroe, hallaron una carta cerrada que le advertía el riesgo de concurrir al teatro, esa noche; también Julio César, al encaminarse al lugar donde lo aguardaban los puñales de sus amigos, recibió un memorial que no llegó a leer, en que iba declarada la traición, con los nombres de los traidores. La mujer de César, Calpurnia, vio en sueños abatir una torre que le había decretado el Senado; falsos y anónimos rumores, la víspera de la muerte de Kilpatrick, publicaron en todo el país el incendio de la torre circular de Kilgarvan, hecho que pudo parecer un presagio, pues aquél había nacido en Kilgarvan. . . . [Ryan] piensa en la historia decimal que ideó Condorcet; en las morfologías que propusieron Hegel, Spengler y Vico; en los hombres de Hesíodo, que degeneran desde el oro hasta el hierro. Piensa en la transmigración de las almas, doctrina que da horror a las letras célticas y que el propio César atribuyó a los druidas británicos” (“Tema” 496–97).

29. Perhaps even in light of my analysis of Bertolucci’s cinematic spaces in chapter 8, one could think of Benjamin’s discussion of “*das Bild*” (the image) in his reading of Proust (“The Image of Proust” 201–2).

30. In Weber’s classic rereading of Freud’s castration complex in Lacanian terms, the castration anxiety on which Freud based his definition of the uncanny is not literally the boy’s fear of losing his penis but a restructuring of experience in which the “narcissistic categories of identity and presence are riven by a difference that can no longer subdue or command” (“The Sideshow” 216–17).

31. “Uncanny is the word always falling away from itself into its opposite, yet affirming itself in doing so. The uncanny comes into being as a violation of the law of non-contradiction. Like a ghost, it ‘is’ and ‘is not’” (Bernstein 1113).

32. “vastas y errantes representaciones teatrales, que requieren miles de actores y que reiteran episodios históricos en las mismas ciudades y montañas donde ocurrieron” (“Tema” 497).

33. “Esa investigación . . . es uno de los hiatos del argumento” (“Tema” 497).

34. “He aquí lo acontecido” (“Tema” 497). The subhead for this section is a citation from “El Aleph,” where the narrator exclaims: “Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato, empieza aquí, mi desesperación de escritor” (624). (“I come now to the ineffable center of my tale; it is here that a writer’s hopelessness begins” [*The Aleph* 282].)

35. “con pruebas irrefutables” (“Tema” 498).

36. “el instrumento para la emancipación de la patria” (“Tema” 498).

37. “la vida es el libreto” (*Obras completas en colaboración* 332).

38. Aware of the “politics of adaptation,” Nolan (with Borges) borrows an icon of British national identity—identity clearly connected with colonial and imperial norms—and exploits it to articulate rebellion against cultural hegemony and political subjection. For a general reading of Shakespeare as a “monument to be toppled” see Garber 7; and Fischlin and Fortier. On Borges and Shakespeare see Barrenechea, *Borges* 114.

39. “La pública y secreta representación comprendió varios días. El condenado entró en Dublin, discutió, obró, rezó, reprobó, pronunció palabras patéticas, y cada uno de esos actos que reflejaría la gloria, había sido prefijado por Nolan. Centenares de actores colaboraron con el protagonista; el rol de algunos fue complejo; el de otros, momentáneo. . . . Kilpatrick, arrebatado por ese minucioso destino que lo redimía y que lo perdía, más de una vez enriqueció con actos y palabras improvisadas el texto de su juez. Así fue desplegándose en el tiempo el populoso drama, hasta que el 6 de agosto de 1824, en un palco de funerarias cortinas que prefiguraba el de Lincoln, un balazo anhelado entró en el pecho del traidor y del héroe, que apenas pudo articular, entre dos efusiones de brusca sangre, algunas palabras previstas” (“Tema” 498).

40. “en la obra de Nolan, los pasajes imitados de Shakespeare son los *menos* dramáticos” (“Tema” 498).

41. “para que una persona, en el porvenir, diera con la verdad” (“Tema” 498).

42. “perdur[a] en los libros históricos, en la memoria apasionada de Irlanda” (“Tema” 498).

43. “comprende que él también forma parte de la trama de Nolan. . . . Al cabo de tenaces cavilaciones, resuelve silenciar el descubrimiento. Publica un libro dedicado a la gloria del héroe; también eso, tal vez, estaba previsto” (“Tema” 498).

44. “Tan compleja es la realidad, tan fragmentaria y tan simplificada la historia, que un observador omnisciente podría redactar un número indefinido y casi infinito, de biografías de un hombre, que destacan hechos independientes” (“Sobre” 729).

45. For an analysis of Borges’s ironic use of foundational political myths in “Tema” see Pérez 81–94.

46. In this context see Susan Bernstein’s analysis of the uncanny following Heidegger’s discussion of the pitfall of “definition” in “On the Question of Being” (114–15).

47. Jean Ricardou defines a text’s “interdimensional self-reflectivity” as that which operates between fiction (what is said) and narration (how it is said) (212).

48. For a masterful discussion of the dissolution of the subject in Borges’s duplicative schemes and symmetrical narratives see Molloy 40–55.

49. Linda Hutcheon would probably speak of “The Uncanny” as a “covert” form of narcissistic narrative, one in which the process of self-reflection is implicit; that is to say, it is structured and actualized within the text (*Narcissistic* 31).

50. “Toute œuvre . . . raconte, à travers la trame . . . l’histoire de sa propre création” (*Littérature* 49).

51. Weber makes a similar point regarding the structure of Freud’s essay “Das Unheimliche.” He argues that, by staging what it cannot fully define, the essay’s “constative” discourse subversively fulfills itself as a “performative happening” (“Uncanny Thinking” 21).

52. For a discussion of the uncanny as a realm of “liminality” see Jackson 63–72.

CHAPTER EIGHT: From Icon to Simulacrum

1. See James, “Preface to *The American*.”

2. On adaptation as strife see Cohen, “Eisenstein’s Subversive Adaptation.” See also Bloom 5–45.

3. Bertolucci explained:

Tara è anche una parola molto infantile: “Tara” è come la parola detta da un bambino che incomincia a parlare; forse è il modo per dire “cara” alla madre. Non a caso questa città è nata dopo 2 o 3 mesi che avevo iniziato l’analisi, nel momento di grandissimo entusiasmo per la scoperta freudiana. . . . Tara rappresenta . . . la rinuncia a Parma forse perché questo bisogno di condannare la cultura paterna io l’ho sentito in modo particolare, e credo sia presente un po’ in tutti i miei film. Da questa condanna e dal bisogno di una nuova identità è venuta fuori l’idea di creare una nuova città che non fosse Parma, legata in troppi modi alla figura del padre. C’era poi anche la suggestione un po’ surrealistica di Borges e il cercare di materializzare una città che fosse l’inconscio, cioè una città in cui i termini reali sono aboliti e ci sono solo vecchi e bambini. (Casetti, *Bertolucci* 5)

4. As we will see, the web of Bertolucci’s allusions is as intricate as Borges’s. The interplay of historical, literary, musical, theatrical, pictorial, and cinematic references and the intersection of stories emphasize the metafictional dimension of the narrative and complicate the transitivity between the world and its representations. See also Wicks 28–30.

5. Bertolucci called *La strategia* “a sort of psychoanalytic therapy, a journey through the realm of pre-conscious memory” (Roud 61).

6. Bertolucci discusses his preference for shooting on location rather than in a studio in Rafele 179.

7. Detailed studies devoted to Vespasiano’s planning and building of Sabbioneta include Tellini Perina; Forster “From ‘Rocca’” 9; Marani 19–24; and Agosta Del Forte 151–54.

8. The dialogue in *La strategia del ragno*, often illogical and replete with non sequiturs, constitutes the verbal counterpart to the film’s broken chronology. For a discussion of the editing technique in *La strategia del ragno* as a means to “deny the viewer a coherent and consistent chain of cause and effect undermining the very essence of chronological duration” see Bondanella, “Borges, Bertolucci” 8–9; and Bordwell 95. *La strategia del ragno* is a masterful rebuttal to the critical cliché that while prose fiction can create subtle shifts between past, present, and future, film (and performance media in general) is more fixedly bound to the present. While it may be true that “in translating literature

into moving pictures, once-upon-a-time collides with here-and-now" (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley xiii), film has equally sophisticated means to express temporal complexities (Stam, *Literature and Film* 21; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 56–68).

9. Cinematographer Vittorio Storaro evoked this ambivalence with his masterful use of light in the film. He exploited the intensity of the midday summer light and the bluish muted colors of the brief interval between late afternoon and night to create highly artificial and artistic effects of lighting, which Bertolucci compared to the surrealistic canvases by Magritte (Ungari 63; Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 53). Bertolucci and Storaro thus gave a painterly feel to the landscape and a stagelike appearance to Tara.

10. "Avrei voluto [che *La strategia del ragno*] fosse il primo film prodotto dalla Regione Emilia Romagna, che allora era appena nata: il suo carattere di regionalità per me era molto importante. . . . Io credo che regionale voglia dire popolare, e che popolare voglia dire regionale" (Casetti, *Bertolucci* 15).

11. Vespasiano Gonzaga Colonna was born on December 6, 1531, in the town of Fondi, in Latium, the son of Luigi (Rodomonte) Gonzaga and Isabella Colonna. He was educated by his aunt Giulia Gonzaga in Naples and traveled extensively as a page to Phillip II of Spain. After his marriage to Diana Cardona in 1549, he returned for longer periods to his possessions in Sabbioneta. In the service of the emperor, Vespasiano took part in numerous campaigns, including a siege-tour of the Papal castles of Tivoli, Agnani, Volpiano, and Vicovaro, when fighting against Pope Paul IV and his French allies. After the death of Diana in 1559, he married Anna of Aragon, with whom he fathered Isabella and Luigi. Anna died in 1567 and Luigi in 1580. Vespasiano was elevated to viceroy of Navarre and Valencia and during his term built fortresses in Spain and North Africa. In 1577 he was elevated to the rank of duke. He did not have any children with his third wife, Margherita Gonzaga, and the resulting lack of heirs irreparably damaged the independent future of the small ducato and consigned it to a long period of decadence. Vespasiano died in 1591. For more detailed biographical information see Agosta Del Forte; and Marani.

12. As Stefano Mazzoni and Ovidio Guaita point out, the Latin aphorism recurred in both Scamozzi's *Idea dell'architettura universale* and in books 3 and 5 of Serlio's treatise *Libri cinque d'architettura* (54).

13. By collating Augustus and Aeneas in his own persona, Vespasiano erased all distinctions between the province of fiction and that of history, simultaneously elevating history into the atemporality of myth and incorporating myth into the reality of lived history. The mythic origin of Vespasiano is emphasized in the *Camerino di Enea*, in the *Palazzo del giardino* ("Garden Palace"), with its cycles of frescoes inspired by the first six books of the *Aeneid* (Ventura 68–70; Grötz 153–79). The decorations of Vespasiano's *Palazzo ducale* furnish the historical counterpart to the *Palazzo del giardino*'s mythical representations. For the center of government and political action (as opposed to the Garden Palace's *otium*), Vespasiano commissioned and collected portraits aimed at commemorating the antiquity of the Gonzaga lineage, with a clear intent of dynastic celebration and diplomatic homage (Ventura, "Vespasiano e i Gonzaga" 208–19; Grötz 153). Though Vespasiano underscored the Gonzagas' historical origins in the ducal palace, he never overlooked his family's idealization according to classical models. Leone Leoni's bronze statue of Vespasiano, originally erected in front of the palace, displays Vespas-

siano clad in Roman armor, his right arm extended in a gesture of command or salute, his left covered with the *paludamentum*, echoing the *gravitas* of the classical models of Augustus and Trajan and, more specifically, imitating the Capitoline equestrian figure of Marcus Aurelius. Like the emperors and magistrates of ancient Rome, Vespasiano sits on the *sella curulis*, his left hand resting on a book. The allegories of *arma et leges* contribute to constructing the image of the ruler who controls and preserves the political and social domain of which he is the absolute *conditor*. In Sabbioneta the construction of the city as collective endeavor was subsumed to the choices and directives of a single individual, Vespasiano (Belluzzi 228; Mazzoni and Guaita 49).

14. Also called *Corridor grande*, the Galleria was built between 1583 and 1586.

15. These emblems exemplified Vespasiano's most prestigious and cherished family ties, such as those with the Malatestas, Colonnas, Appianos, and Fieschis (Bazzotti 379–81).

16. For an interpretation of Sabbioneta's anachronism see Dall'Acqua.

17. A man of war and letters, Vespasiano combined the skills of a military engineer with a broad humanistic education. See Agosta Del Forte 185.

18. Vespasiano himself designed and supervised the building of fortresses in Spain and North Africa. Domenico Giunti, the architect and military engineer who designed the new walls and urban expansion of Guastalla in 1549, is said to have collaborated with Vespasiano on Sabbioneta as well (Tellini Perina 13; Carpeggiani 39). See also Tafuri 226. On specific treatises on fortified cities see Carpeggiani 33.

19. Fra Giocondo's and Daniele Barbaro's exegeses of Vitruvius's *De architectura*, Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* (1485), and Pietro Cataneo's *I quattro primi libri di architettura* (1554) included seminal discussions on the rules of proportion and perspective in architectural representation, as well as designs of fortified cities and plans for ideal ones. Following Alberti's principles, Bernardo Rossellino created a new urban center in Pienza between 1459 and 1469. Luciano Laurana oversaw the renewal of Urbino from about 1446 to 1472. This list should include Rimini, with the additions and changes by Sigismondo Pandolfi Malatesta, and Ferrara, with Biagio Rossetti's Addizione Erculea commissioned by Ercole I of Este. Notable are also the urban renovation projects of Mantua, under the tutelage of Gianfrancesco and Ludovico Gonzaga, and of Francesco Sforza's Milan. Palmanova, with its nine-pointed star shape, was designed by Scamozzi. See also Tellini Perina 12; Carpeggiani 13–14.

20. On Vespasiano's potential acquaintance with the treatises by Cataneo and Martini see Marani 20; and Agosta Del Forte 154. On the various geometric designs for ideal cities see Le Mollé 293–97. Sebastiano Serlio, Vasari il Giovane, Francesco De Marchi, and Vincenzo Scamozzi designed model city plans as well. Undoubtedly, Scamozzi's *L'idea dell'architettura universale* was inspired by his stay in Sabbioneta while building the theater.

21. As Le Mollé eloquently observes: “La figure de l'homme inscrite dans le cercle établit une correspondance à la fois mathématique et métaphysique entre l'homme et l'univers, entre l'homme et Dieu, entre le microcosme et le macrocosme; la figure vitruvienne (illustrée par Leonardo, Francesco di Giorgio, F. Giorgi, Cesare Cesarano, Fra Giocondo) élève l'homme aux dimensions de l'univers en même temps que l'univers devient accessible à l'homme. . . . La figure humaine est à la base de tout plan centré, que ce soit celui du temple ou celui de la ville idéale” (“The human shape inscribed

into a circle establishes a mathematical as well as metaphysical correspondence between man and the universe, man and God, microcosm and macrocosm. The Vitruvian man—illustrated by Leonardo, Francesco di Giorgio, F. Giorgi, Cesare Cesarano, Fra Giocundo—elevates man to universal dimensions at the same time in which the universe becomes accessible to man. . . . The human shape finds all centered design, regardless of whether it is the design of a temple or of an ideal city”) (290).

22. By developing the dreams of ideal cities designed to mirror organic and rational aesthetic theories, these thinkers partook of the inspiration that created the literary utopias of the Renaissance. See, for example, the utopias by Thomas More, Anton Francesco Doni, Tommaso Campanella, Ludovico Agostini, and Francesco Patrizi.

23. The *Sala dei circhi* (also known as *Camera di Filemone e Bauci*) in Vespasiano's Garden Palace illustrates the superimposition of the notion of the ideal city onto the nostalgic model of ancient Rome. On a wall between two windows overlooking Piazza Castello is a fresco of an ideal townscape that repeats the view one sees from these windows (Ventura 65). On the opposite wall, facing the villa's garden, there is a corresponding fresco of a picturesque landscape. The other two walls show paintings of Rome's *Circus Maximus* and *Circus Flaminius*. Rome, Sabbioneta, and the ideal city engage in a game of mirrors and mutual reflections—a play of controlled perspectives, historical references, and cultural echoes that emphasize “man's” ability to direct and bring to ideal perfection the environment in which he lives.

24. Carpeggiani writes, “La prospettiva . . . [è] operazione oggettiva fondata su canoni codificati e immutabili, rappresentazione di uno spazio che ha nel suo centro l'uomo” (“Perspective . . . [is] an objective operation based on codified and immutable principles. It is the representation of a space that has man at its center”) (11).

25. In spite of these variations, the city's “navel” was still identified by a column with a statue of Pallas Athena. On the anthropomorphization of the city according to the model of the Vitruvian man see Le Mollé 290–91.

26. Forster writes:

A pre-established system is refracted, namely at once spelled out *and* broken. The Piazza Grande does not open upon axial approach, the small irregular square between Palazzo Ducale and the Incoronata is visually closed to all sides, several streets, including the main artery show a deliberately “slanted” recession of their facades, all end in L- or T-traps. While the main street breaks twice upon entering either gate, as Alberti had recommended over a century before, the trap-endings of all other streets as well as their diagonal slanting can hardly be taken as a primary means of defense strategy. Among other things, it would have proved at least as difficult to man and defend such a “trap” as it was to enter and conquer it. Vespasiano certainly knew better in matters of military architecture, yet it is equally certain that these “irregularities” at Sabbioneta are planned. (Forster, “From ‘Rocca’” 16)

27. Surrounded by walls and endowed with a major shrine at their center, cities such as Troy, Babylon, and Jerusalem inspired the walled city motif common to labyrinth design. For a more detailed discussion of the connections between the image of the city and that of the labyrinth see Pennick 36; Vercelloni 9; and especially Santarcangeli 66–70.

28. *Olympus in the Midst of a Labyrinth*. The labyrinth also related the Renaissance Vespasiano to his Roman namesake, Emperor Vespasian, the founder of the Flavian dynasty, who rebuilt Rome after the civil war. Vespasian's son, Domitian, erected the Domus Flavia, which displayed a model labyrinth in its peristyle.

29. Scamozzi designed the theater's interior soon after his completion of Palladio's Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza. For an analysis of the theater's originality as the first theater conceived as an autonomous building see Calendoli. Discussion of Scamozzi's now lost *Trattato sulla prospettiva* ("Treatise on Perspective") can be found in Mazzoni 20–30.

30. In Sabbioneta's perfectly balanced spatial symbolism the theater occupied the midpoint between Vespasiano's public arena (with the ducal palace and its piazza) and his private domain (with the Garden Palace and the Galleria degli Antichi). The Theater of Sabbioneta was named Teatro all'antica by Tommaso Temanza (433).

31. For other references to Rome see Forster "Stagecraft" 81.

32. Scamozzi spoke of a "gran piazza con una strada nobilissima nel mezzo" ("a great square with a most noble street in the middle") (Temanza 434).

33. "sembrò cangiata in un teatro" (Belluzzi 228). As Forster writes: "The erection of columns and statues, the accents given to ducal buildings by slender turrets and coats of arms and the unifying decoration of façades permanently mark off important areas of the city-stage and image their functions. There are different 'seats' in the city-wide theater, and the optimal place naturally belongs to the Duke" ("From 'Rocca'" 34).

34. On the occasion of the birth of Vespasiano's son, Luigi Gonzaga, Vespasiano commissioned popular representations in which the whole town became a stage and its inhabitants the "actors" in a "scene of the prince" (Belluzzi 228).

35. On the use of urban perspectives in theatrical scenarios as a way to communicate ideas about ideal cities see Vercelloni's discussion of Scamozzi (72).

36. "Ed in vero fra tutti i cinque ordini non è alcuno che più ragguardevole sia e bello del corintio. . . . Quest'ordine rappresenta la sincerità dell'animo" (132).

37. The association between Vespasiano and the allegorical figures of Fortitude and Justice is a leitmotif in Sabbionetan iconography.

38. Scamozzi's *Idea dell'architettura universale* published in Venice in 1615 may be considered a prestigious epigone.

39. The dissolution of Renaissance ideas occurs much more clearly in Doni's *I mondi*, a satirical utopia set in a city shaped in the form of a star. The utopian uniformity of the star city is marked by total negativity in *I mondi*. Doni ironically questions all essentialist values in a "hermaphroditic" world that is neither crazy nor wise (Grendler 487).

40. Bondanella observes that Bertolucci's "use of this name serves as a cue to the careful viewer that *The Spider's Stratagem* will have as at least implicit theme cinematic narration itself" ("Borges, Bertolucci" 6). See also Cajati 137; and especially Matteo 18. Matteo underscores important analogies between *Gone with the Wind* and *La strategia del ragno*: "Both deal with 'war, the conflict between civic duty and private interests, [and] generational conflict'" (18).

41. Besides the homonymy, Bertolucci emphasizes that Athos Jr. repeats Athos Sr. by having Giulio Brogi play both roles.

42. The popular song "Bionda" is also known under the title of "Quando ero piccina piccina."

43. The dialogue in Italian between Draifa and Athos is as follows:

“Erano tutti d'accordo. Intanto l'assassino non l'hanno mai trovato. Gli sbirri gli hanno trovato addosso una lettera anonima ancora chiusa. L'aprirono e c'era scritto che se andava a teatro sarebbe morto.”

“Come Giulio Cesare.”

“Chi?”

“Giulio Cesare prima di entrare in Senato.”

“Come Athos. La stessa roba. Un altro di fatto strano.”

“Un'altra leggenda?”

“Una zingara. Gli ha letto la mano e gli ha predetto la morte. Giuro.”

“Macbeth: la strega della profezia.”

“Tu devi aver studiato molto.”

44. “Athos Magnani, eroe vigliaccamente assassinato dal piombo fascista.”

45. This presence is, in turn, aurally connoted by absence, as Athos's moving toward his father's bust is accompanied by the music from the prelude of act 1, scene 1 of *Attila*, “Liberamente, or piangi” (Freely, now cry), in which the protagonist, Odabella, mourns her father's death and imagines seeing his likeness in a passing cloud. For a detailed study of *Attila* in *La strategia del ragno* see Caldwell.

46. “A Tara è arrivato il cinema, il telefono, la mungitrice elettrica, la televisione. Tutta apparenza. Nella nostra città si è fermato tutto la sera della sua morte.”

47. In discussing his shattering of conventional chronology in *La strategia del ragno*, Bertolucci explained that the film's flashbacks were not really direct shifts to times past but, rather, “representation[s] of what happened” (Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 55; emphasis added). The staged nature of these pseudo-flashbacks is emphasized by the fact that “all the characters don't get younger in the flashbacks” but remain uncannily similar to the way they are in the film's present (Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 55).

48. Crisp and Hillman provide an admirably close reading of the plot similarities with which I am concerned here.

49. “Eravamo degli antifascisti e forse non sapevamo neanche cosa voleva dire. Programmi non ne avevamo mica. . . . Ci sembrava di essere uno di quei personaggi lì, hai capito. Ma non capivamo niente, non capivamo niente. Neanche per sogno, te lo dico io. . . . Tuo padre no. Tuo padre era un'altra cosa. Tuo padre era . . . era molto differente, perché tuo padre sapeva quello . . . Incantevole. Per noi lui quando lo sentivamo parlare, così colto così preparato.”

50. For the antimonarchical (and by extension antidictatorial) implications of *Rigoletto* (based on Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*), which made it an ideal setting for the plotted assassination of the Duce, see Matteo 20–21.

51. Deborah Crisp and Roger Hillman remark that the antifascists often described the Nazis as barbarian invaders comparable to the Huns of *Attila* (260–61).

52. “Com'era lui più da vicino?”

53. “Fammi la fotografia perché è l'ultima volta che mi vedi. . . . Io voglio avere dei capodanni normali. I miei capodanni sono alle undici di sera perché a mezzanotte devi essere da tua moglie. Io voglio dormire con te, svegliarmi con te, voglio annoiarmi con te, mangiare con te.”

54. “Cambierà, cambierà, vedrai, cambierà.” On the emphasizing of the sense of entrapment in this scene see Crisp and Hillman 257.

55. For a more detailed analysis of the use of circular pans to emphasize the circularity of the story see Wicks 30; and Roud 61.

56. “Sarà stata la paura, sarà stato che mi stava così di schiena senza che gli potessi vedere la faccia, ma io ho capito che era tutto finito. Davvero. Era l’ultima volta, l’ultima volta che l’ho visto vivo.”

57. Without offering a specific interpretation, Bertolucci commented on the “mythology . . . of the lion” and stated that the original title of the film was “The Flight of the Lion through the Poplar Trees,” thus suggesting the analogy between Athos and the lion (Chaluja, Schadhauser, and Mingrone 53).

58. For a more detailed reading of these images see Falasca-Zamponi 69–70; Crisp and Hillman 259; and Matteo 24–25.

59. “Judas refleja de algún modo a Jesús” (Borges, “Tres versiones” 515).

60. “Hai conosciuto anche tu mio padre? È vero che era uguale, uguale, uguale?”

61. “Essere un coniglio” (literally, “to be a rabbit”) in Italian means to be a coward.

62. “Di’ la verità, vuoi sapere la verità tu no? . . . Vuoi sapere la verità. Tuo padre diceva che la verità non significa niente. Quello che conta sono le conseguenze della verità. La verità non conta niente.”

63. “Ho avuto paura e sono scappato.”

64. For a discussion of Béla Balász’s notion of *Zeitraum* as the cinematic space-time unity see Eikhenbaum 26. For a brief discussion of how Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope applies to film analysis see Stam, “Introduction” 26–27.

65. This analogy is supported in part by Athos Jr.’s misled suspicion that one of the three friends (or all of them at once) may be the informant. As he confesses to Draifa: “La spia è uno di loro. Tutti e tre. Mio padre li aveva scoperti e loro per paura che li ammazzasse hanno ammazzato lui” (“One of them is the spy. All three of them. My father discovered them and they killed him out of fear he would murder them”).

66. “Nessuno di noi ha tanta mira da essere sicuri di ucciderlo al primo colpo. Dico, matematicamente, al primo colpo. . . . Morale: miccia lenta, capsula detonante, paletto di tritolo. Mezzanotte. Applausi. Fuoco alla miccia! Bum Bum.”

67. On the reassessment of the *Resistenza* myth in other authors such as Pavese and Calvino see, respectively, Binetti; and Re.

68. This is, of course, just the climax in a broader structure of embedded stories. As Ulrich Wicks points out: “Bertolucci is telling the story of Athos Junior, who in turn—along with us—is being told the story of Athos Senior, who in turn created (lived) a story of his own making, which in turn entraps Athos Junior in its plots. This story of stories . . . expands until there seems to be no dividing line between reality and fiction, between history and story” (31).

69. Socci speaks of “un grande teatro di posa” (8).

70. “Story is in pursuit of history which in turn pursues and perpetuates story” (24), Ulrich Wicks writes, as he underscores Athos Sr.’s talent as “showman and illusionist,” who makes “the dawn come early [by crowing] like a rooster, arousing the real roosters to announce the dawn in the middle of the night” (27; see also Chappetta 16). Like Hitler and Mussolini, Wicks argues, Athos indulges in illusions of control and power.

71. For a perceptive reading of the sequence of shots of the grass overgrowing the tracks as an act of homage to Eisenstein see Chappetta 14.

72. Just to select a few examples: *The End of the Bridge* (1914); Robert D. Lacey’s *Tom’s Gang* (1927); Robert N. Bradbury’s *The Lucky Texan* (1934); Cecil B. DeMille’s *Union*

Pacific (1939); and, unrelated to Bertolucci but notable for the parodic appropriation of the image, Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles*.

73. “de algún modo me justifica” (“Tema” 498).

74. “Yo conjeturo que así es. Nosotros . . . hemos soñado el mundo. Lo hemos soñado resistente, misterioso, visible, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenues y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso” (“Avatares” 258).

Afterword

1. This adjective has been widely employed to describe the difficult encounter between Gadamerian hermeneutics and deconstruction, especially in the context of the debate between Gadamer and Jacques Derrida that took place at the Goethe Institute in Paris in April 1981 (see Madison).

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